

SERMONS
AND
DISCOURSES
ON SEVERAL
SUBJECTS
AND
OCCASIONS.

BY
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The Publisher's

PREFACE.

THE following Sermons being the Genuine Works of that Great, but Unfortunate Prelate, whose Name they bear (as I assure the World, bating the Errors of the Press, they all of them are, and as the inimitable Style in which they are written, proves them to be) there needs no Apology for the Publication of them : That they are His, is sufficient to justify their

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Appearance in Print; and to recommend them likewise to the Reader: For his Enemies and Friends seem all to agree in this Part of his Character, That he was as Judicious, Instructive, Convincing, Persuasive, and Delightful a Preacher as ever England bred.

The only Excuse therefore, that I think myself obliged to make on this Occasion, is, for not Publishing more of them, than what are contained in these two posthumous Volumes; for every one will naturally conclude, that he left a great many more behind him, having been a constant Preacher for about Twenty Years, and an occasional one a great deal longer.

The

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The true Reason of my not doing it then is this: He burnt a good many of them himself at Paris, and by a Writing found among what were left, signified, that these were the only ones fit to be printed; so that without acting contrary to the Bishop's Opinion of his own Performances, of which he was certainly the best Judge, no more could, and therefore no more ought to be Published: And it being from thence resolved, that no more should, the only effectual Way of preventing it, was, to commit the rest to the Flames. Which was accordingly done, in my Presence, by William Morice, Esq; his Dutiful and Worthy Son in Law, and Executor. To whom I take this Opportunity of Acknowledging myself

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much obliged for several considerable Acts of Friendship; but particularly for the Benefit of Publishing these pious Remains of my dear Friend and Patron, whom I greatly Admired, Loved, and Reverenced; and to whose Memory I therefore Dedicate them, with an Heart full of Gratitude and Respect.



Tho. Moore.

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SINCE the Printing of these Volumes, I find the Name of Atterbury so injuriously and scurrilously treated in an History just now published, that to obviate all ill Impressions of him, which the Reader may possibly receive from thence, I judge it not amiss to give him a true Notion of the Historian's Character, taken out of the Preface to Dr. Hickes's three Treatises published in 1709. where it is thus said of him:—He was famous for his great Freedom in censuring the Clergy; inso-much, that when he pretended sometimes to commend a few of the best, and brightest of them, who were esteem-ed the Ornaments of the Church, he was observ'd to do it with so many *Buts*, and Exceptions, that like the Adjuncts, which destroy their Subject, they null'd the Praises he pretended to give, and turn'd them almost into perfect Disgrace. And the same Author, after giving us a Specimen of the Historian's Ill-will in general towards the Clergy, by reciting a Passage out of the first Volume of this
very

ADVERTISEMENT.

very History, then shewn him in Manuscript (which I think too gross to repeat) concludes his Account of him with this stinging Reflection:—Were I so vain, as to desire to live in History, it should be in *this*, upon Condition the Writer of it would not speak *well* of me, but *ill*: For the Defamations of such Historians are certain Signs of Merit; the Dishonourable Characters of such vile Pens, are true Marks of Honour; and their Praises and Panegyricks, like the Pillory, are Infamy, Scandal and Disgrace. So will jealous and inquisitive Posterity think of the Characters in this *Anecdote*; they will interpret them all, whether good or bad, by the *Rule of contrary*; they will believe nothing upon the bare Report of the Author, but be apt to think ill of those, of whom he speaks well, and well of all, of whom he speaks ill.

X I shall add no Reflections of my own on this Occasion, for I think there needs none but leave the World to judge, how far Dr. Hickes's Words are verified in Burnet's History, and the Reputation it bears.

THE
PUBLIC MANNER,
In which the
G O S P E L
Was at first promulged,
One considerable Evidence of its
DIVINE AUTHORITY.

VOL. III.

B

PUBLISHED IN A



Was at first promulgated

One considerable Evidence of the
Divine Authority

Vol. III

The G O S P E L openly published. ✕

A

S E R M O N

Preach'd at

Westminster-Abbey,

November 1, 1718.

A C T S xxvi. 26.

This Thing was not done in a Corner.

IT might be hoped, that, in a Coun- S E R M.
try, where the Religion of *Christ* is I.
not only publicly professed, but inter-
woven into the Civil Frame, and esta-
blish'd by a Law, the Truth of Christi-
B 2 anity

S E R M. anity might at all times be taken for
 I. granted; and that the Ministers of *Christ*
 might have nothing to do, but to build
 on that Foundation, and be ever employ-
 ed in exciting Men to a Practice suitable

Tit. ii. 10. to their Profession, and to *adorn the*
Doctrine of our God and Saviour in all
things. But, alas! the frequent and

daring Attempts of *Infidelity* that inter-
 rupt us in our Course, make it necessary
 Heb. vi. 1. for us to *lay again the Foundation* (as the
 Apostle speaks) and to apologize for
 Christianity, just as if it were now in its
 infant State, and newly setting forth in
 the World.

God forgive *Them*, who put us upon
 this unwelcome Task! — In the mean
 time *We*, I'm sure, were not to be forgiv-
 en, should we appear less solicitous to sup-
 port and vindicate that Faith, into which
 we were baptized, and to the Preaching
 of which we are peculiarly dedicated,
 than some Men are to undermine and
 destroy it. And of *All* the Circumstan-
 ces which add a particular Strength to
 the Evidence given for the Truth of the
 Gospel,



Gospel, there is none more advantageous S E R M.
to it, than the Consideration of that *Fair*, I.
Open, and *Illustrious* Manner, wherein it
was proved, and propagated by *Christ*
and his Apostles. There was no Af-
fectionation of *Privacy* in what they said,
or did; their Doctrines were preached,
and their Miracles wrought in broad
Day-light, and in the Face of the World;
in the most frequented Places, before
thousands, and ten thousands of Witnesses:
This thing, says St. *Paul*, in his admira-
ble Apology before *Agrippa* and *Festus*,
was not done in a Corner.

I shall briefly open and *illustrate* this
Truth, in order to (what I chiefly intend)
the drawing from thence some useful
Observations and *Improvements*, which it
will naturally afford us.

First, When our Saviour began to pub- I.
lish the Gospel of his Kingdom, he did not,
as Deceivers use to do, vent his new Do-
ctrines, or pretend to perform his Won-
ders (the Evidence of his divine Mission)
in Places where there was no body fit to

SERM. Oppose the One, or to disprove the Other.

I. From the first Moment he entered upon his Office, he appeared *publickly*, he taught, he conversed, he did Miracles *publickly* [not gaining upon Mankind by *Stealth*, not opening his Pretences *Darkly* at first, and to a *Few*, and then, by their Means, drawing in Others, and going on thus *under-hand* to form an Interest, and to establish a Party, which, as soon as he should make his Publick Claim, might immediately come in to him, support, and own him. No] he broke out upon the World *all at once*, came into the midst of Men without any Partisans, or Followers, presently opened his Commission, and took upon himself the Character of an Ambassador from Heaven.

Throughout the whole Course of his Ministry, he addressed himself constantly to *Multitudes*, lived chiefly in great *Towns* and *Cities*, and in the most frequented Parts of them, the *Streets*, the *Market-places*, the *Temple*, and the *Synagogues*; where his Life and Doctrine,
and

and Miracles might, by his professed SERM.
Enemies be narrowly Observed and Ex- I.
amined. And if at any time he with-
drew into the Desert, and did Wonders
there, it was not in order to fly the Eyes
of Men, but that he might have *Room*,
by that means, to manifest his divine
Power, and preach his Heavenly Truths
to yet greater Numbers. [Accordingly
we find with him in the Wilderness
three thousand Witnesses of a Miracle,
at One time, and even five thousand at
Another.] And therefore, when the
High Priest questioned him concerning
his Disciples and his Doctrine, he made
this Reply, *I spake openly to the World, I* Joh. xviii.
ever taught in the Synagogue, and in the 20, 21.
Temple, whither the Jews always resort;
and in Secret have I said nothing: Why
askest thou me? Ask them which heard me,
What I have said unto them; behold, they
know what I said.

The Beginning of Miracles that Jesus
did, was before much Company, at a
Marriage Feast; and the last he wrought
were in the midst of Jerusalem, where

S E R M. the whole Nation of the *Jews* were *then*

I. assembled to celebrate the Passover. And
 whenever he manifested his Divine Mission by the chief Seal and Evidence of it, his raising any one from the Dead, he took care at that time especially to be surrounded with Numbers.

He pitched upon such Persons for the Subjects of his miraculous Cures, whose Infirmities and Diseases were notorious, and of a long standing: One, who had been blind from his very Birth; another diseased with an Issue of Blood twelve Years; and a Third, troubled with a Palsy for thirty eight Years; so that there could be no possible Confederacy in a Case, where the Person cured was known to have laboured under that Distemper some Years before our Saviour was born.

He so ordered the matter, that some of those he healed should immediately repair to the *Pharisees* and *Priests*, his inveterate and Powerful Enemies, and give *them* an Opportunity of detecting the Fraud, if there were any; That
 others

others should be soon after called before the Sanhedrin itself, and strictly questioned about the Reality of their Cure that so these Facts might have the Earliest and Strongest Confirmation possible from the fruitless Enquiry and Opposition of those, who were most loth to believe them. At least, when he healed any Person in private, without thus directing him to notify the Cure, he then enjoined Secrecy to him, on purpose to obviate all possible Suspicions of Art and Contrivance.

As he had *Lived*, so he *Died* in *Publick*; Expired upon a Cross, in the Top of an Eminence near *Jerusalem*. When Buried, he had a publick Guard set upon his Grave, and he Arose from thence in the Presence of that very Guard, and to their Astonishment. He appeared afterwards to five hundred Brethren at once, to the twelve Disciples frequently; Eat, Drank, and Converſed with them for forty Days, and was at last taken up into Heaven in their Sight, by a Slow and Leisurely Ascent.

In

SERM. In all Respects and Circumstances the

I.  Gospel of *Christ* shewed itself to proceed from the great *Father of Lights*, in whom is no *Darkness* at all; it was established upon Proofs, as Authentick, Publick, and Solemn, as can well be imagined; Bright, Evident, and Powerful, as the Sun at Noon Day. As its Founder once appealed to his Disciples, and said, *Handle me, and see; for a Spirit hath not Flesh and Bones, as ye see me have*; so may the Doctrine itself make a like Challenge to its Enemies, and say; "Handle me, and see; for Delusion and Imposture hath not such Substantial Evidences, so Open, Ocular, and Sensible a Demonstration to boast of, as I have." — *This Thing was not done in a Corner.*

Luk. xxiv.
39.

II. *Secondly*, Having thus briefly Explained and Illustrated the Truth contained in these Words, I shall now apply myself to (what I chiefly intended) the drawing from thence those several Useful *Observations* and *Improvements*, with which it will furnish us. And the

I. *First*

I. *First Use* I will make of it, shall SERM.
be, to shew from thence, how great an I.
Advantage the Christian Religion hath, 
on this Account, over all other Religions,
whether true or false; not excepting
even the Dispensation of *Moses*.

'Tis true, scarce any Religion ever set
up in the World, without pretending,
sooner or later, to derive its Authority
from Miracles. But then, either those
Miracles (as they are called) have been
acted confessedly in Secret; or, if they
are said to have been done in Publick,
yet the Account, which was given of
them, came too late to deserve Credit,
or to leave room for a Disproof. And
in *Both* these Cases the Pretence to them
is very suspicious.

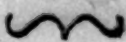
Thus, in the first Instance, *Numa's*
Nightly Conferences with a Goddess,
was a Figment, for which the People of
Rome had His Word only; the Truth of
the whole Transaction was resolved into
his single Testimony. And such was
Mabomet's vain Boast of his receiving
several Chapters of his *Alcoran* from
the

SERM. the Angel *Gabriel*; for he wrought no

I. *publick* Miracle to enforce this *private* one; nor did he, that we can learn, pretend to the Power of working any. On the contrary, when Miracles were demanded of him, he at first (as his Followers have done ever since) appealed to the *Alcoran* itself, as to the greatest and most convincing Miracle; which was written (he said) in such a manner, as to carry upon it the plain Stamp and Evidence of its own Divine Authority. And this was the Only way in which he could make out his intercourse with the Angel *Gabriel*.

Thus again, the several Idolatrous Religions in the *East* and *West Indies*, are said to have received their Sanction from Miracles done by the first Authors and Founders of them: But then the Reporters of these Facts are so much later than the Facts themselves, that 'tis impossible to have any Rational Assurance concerning the Reality of them: [Their *Mango-Copal*, *Amida*, *Brama* and *Zaca* are supposed to have atchieved Wonders]

at

at a time when there was no way of SERM.
transmitting Accounts of them to Poste- I.
rity, but by Memory alone, and some 
thousands of Years before there could be
any written Monuments of them. Now
this, I say, is to build the Proof of Di-
vine Truths upon the *Certainty* of some
Accounts, whereof Men can *never be*
certain; it is to establish the Belief of a
Revelation upon *Things done*, or said to
be done, *in a Corner*, and which require a
new Revelation to make *them* Credible.

The *Jewish* Religion was indeed pu-
blished by God in a very open and solemn
Manner, before a whole Nation, with
Thunders and Lightnings, and the Sound
of Heavenly Trumpets, on the Top of
Mount *Sinai*. Yet still Infidelity finds
room to object, that the Truth of this
Revelation depends upon the Testimony
of Friends only; and that the Scene of it
is laid in a Place, where nobody *could* be
present, but the Persons concerned to
support the Account, whether True or
False. And should any of these Persons
have been inclined to contradict it, yet
they

SERM. they could not; because the whole Race

1. of them perished in the Wilderness, e'er
 a Correspondence was as yet opened between them, and any Other People.

Such Objections, 'tis true, are of no Weight, laid in the Balance with the Evidence given for the Truth of those Facts; yet it is some Advantage to the Proof of Gospel Miracles, not to be liable even to these little Exceptions, and on no side to lie open to any Doubts or Suspicions whatsoever. And from hence we may take Occasion to consider also in the

2. *Second* place, how inexcusable They are, who, notwithstanding that open, Incontestable manner, in which the Divine Authority of the Gospel was manifested, continue still to stand out against it; to resist and even to Deride the Utmost Efforts made by an Omnipotent Arm towards asserting the Mission of *Jesus*; to parallel them with the Mock Wonders of Satan, and the Impostures of False Prophets; and to insinuate, as if they were all equally done by Collusion,

fion. Such was He, whose *Name* ought S E R M.
not to be mentioned without Reproach, 1.

and whom *therefore* I shall not mention; 
but his *Words* are these: “ If we look
“ (says he) upon the Impostures wrought
“ by Confederacy, there is nothing,
“ how impossible soever to be done,
“ that is impossible to be believed. For
“ Two Men conspiring, the one to seem
“ *Lame*, the other to cure him with a
“ *Charm*, will deceive Many; but Many
“ conspiring, One to seem *Lame*, Ano-
“ ther to Cure him, and all the rest to
“ bear Witness, will deceive more.”

Which was intended to suggest, that the
Miraculous Cures recorded in the Go-
spel, were not really *Cures*, but *Cheats*,
and concerted between the seeming Ob-
jects and Authors of them; though the
Relation of several of those Cures be, as
I shewed before, so circumstanced, as to
make this Account of them not only Ri-
diculous, but Impossible. He might as
well have pretended to explain the Mira-
cle of our Saviour's giving Eyes to the
Blind, by reasoning on the Medicinal
Virtues

SERM. Virtues of the Clay and the Spittle employed on that Occasion.

I.

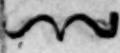
The Men who talk at this rate (as, I fear many Men now do, and that Openly, and *not in a Corner*) who can bring themselves thus to confound the plainest Marks of Truth and Falshood, Reality and Imposture; and to impute the most Clear and Demonstrative Proofs that ever were given of a Divine Power, to Confederacy and a Juggle; such Men, I say, are *inexcusable* upon all the Accounts of right Reason and good Sense; and *incurable* by all further Methods of Proof that can possibly be addressed to them. They are Infidels, not because they want sufficient Grounds of Conviction, but because they resolve not to be otherwise. To no purpose is it to dispute with them about these *Foundations* of our Faith; to no purpose is it to Exhort, Beseech, Persuade, or Reprove them: *Their Eyes are shut, that they cannot see; and their Ears stopped, that they cannot hear; and their Hearts hard as the Nether Mill-stone.* Our Reasonings of this kind may indeed be
of

of some Use, in respect of *Those*, who SERM.
are yet untainted with the Principles of I.
Infidelity; and may serve to keep such
free from the Infection: But, to suppose
that any Good can be done by them upon
Those, who pretend to have weighed the
Evidence of the Gospel in a Balance,
and to have found it light; is a Supposi-
tion, fit only for those to make, who
have not tried it. A

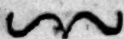
3. *Third* thing, which we learn from
the Doctrine of the Text, is, to satisfy
ourselves of the Vanity of those Pre-
tences which are made to Miracles in the
Romish Communion. The Members of
it boast very much of mighty Signs and
Wonders wrought by some Canonized,
and some Uncanonized Saints; their Le-
gends, their Sermons are full of them;
even their great Advocate lays such a
Stress upon the Number and Kinds of
them, as to make the *Glory of Miracles*
One of the fifteen *Notes*, by which that
Church may be discerned to be the only
true Church of *Christ*. But now, as Con-
fidently, and *Publickly*, as they make

SERM. these Boasts of Miracles, we may ob-

I. serve, that the Miracles themselves are
 W said to have been done very *Privately* in
 Religious Houses, and Places of Secrecy
 and Retirement; in Remote Regions of
 the World, whither no body will go to
 disprove them; in Superstitious Coun-
 tries, where no Man hath a Mind, or
 Leave to examine them. And these are
 Circumstances, which smell strongly of
 Imposture and Contrivance; for why
 should Things design'd for publick Use
 and Influence, be thus transacted in the
 Dark, without Witnesses? A *Miracle* is,
 in the Nature of it, somewhat done for
 the Conversion of Infidels; it is *a Sign*,
 1 Corin. not to them that believe, but to them that
 xiv. 22. believe not: And yet it so happens, that
 Popish Miracles are generally done at
Home, before Believers, where there is
 little or no Need of them, or Doubts
 concerning them: Or if *Abroad*, yet
 they are placed at such a convenient Di-
 stance, as not to lie within reach of
 Confutation. In *China* and *Japan* these
 Wonder-workers may pretend to have
 done

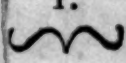
done as many Miracles as they please, SERM.
without the Fear of a Discovery ; in *Spain* I.
and *Italy* they may venture, now and 
then, to set up for them, where there
are so many always ready to favour their
Pretences, and to run into any Pious
Fraud that can be contrived for them.
But in Heretical Countries (as they term
Ours) they are very shy, and sparing of
their Talent this way ; and still, the
more Heresy there is in a Country, the
fewer Miracles are heard of there. How
can a Man choose but suspect these Odd
Stories, told under such suspicious Cir-
cumstances ? How can he be blamed for
not entertaining them ? For, as our
Saviour's Brethren once reasoned with
him (and they Reasoned right, though
they Applied it wrong) so may we with
One of these Pretenders to Miracles :
There is no Man doth any thing in Secret John vii.
and He himself seeketh to be known openly ; 4.
if Thou do these Things, shew thyself to the
World. And whoever totally declines
this Trial, must not expect to have any
Credit given, either to the Miracles he

SERM. pretends to have done, or to the Message he brings.

I. 

But the most absurd Pretence of this kind, and the most opposite to the Doctrine delivered, is, that famous Miracle of the corporal Presence in the Eucharist; which is done so much in the dark, that no body ever *did* or *can* see it, either *before*, or *after* it was done, or even *while* it is doing; no, not the Doer himself, as loudly as he may boast of it. The Miracles of the Gospel are so many Appeals to the *Senses* of Men; but this is a strange *New* kind of Miracle, which is perfectly *invisible*. To say, that it must be received by Faith, that we must *believe* it to be a Miracle, is to destroy the very End and Design of Miracles; which are Works done, in order to procure the Belief of somewhat else; and are not therefore themselves to be believed, and taken for granted. In a word, it is a Miracle, the doing of which is so utterly a Secret, that it wants another Miracle to prove it to be one. And yet of all things in the World, it is the

the

the most incapable of being proved this S E R M.
way ; for Miracles being, as I said, Ap- I.
peals to our Senses, and Transubstanti- 
ation a plain Coontradiction to them ;
the Calling in of a Miracle to evince
the Truth of this Doctrine would be (as
One very justly reasons) “ to prove to a
“ Man by what he sees, that he doth not
“ see what he sees.” Either therefore
the pretended corporal Prefence is no
Miracle ; or, if it be one, we are still
Excusable in not admitting it, since it
comes to us in a way so very Singular,
and demands our Assent against the Tes-
timony of Sense, upon the Reports of
which all other Miracles are founded.
Again,

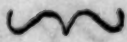
4. *Fourthly*, the Doctrine discoursed
of teaches us likewise to reject all Pre-
tences to the Spirit, to private Visions,
and inward Illuminations, by which En-
thusiastical or designing Men endeavour
to establish their own particular Opini-
ons, and to give them a sacred Authori-
ty. *Should* these strange things they tell
us, be true ; yet they are transacted *pri-*

SERM. *vately*, between God and their Own

I. Souls, and cannot therefore reasonably
 be made a Foundation for the Publick
 Reception of any Doctrine, or Opinion:
 [For whenever God intends to establish
 any thing openly, he gives Open Proof
 and Evidence of it; his Notice reaches
 always as far as he designs to extend his
 Revelation; and They therefore, who
 have no Sure Sign or Notice, that a Truth
 is revealed, cannot in reason be obliged
 to entertain it. Thus it would be, I
 say, supposing these Visions, and Re-
 velations alledged, were really *true*;
 whereas we have indeed the best ground
 in the World for suspecting them to be
false;) since it is evidently contrary to
 all the Divine Methods of acting, with
 which we are acquainted, that God
 should give a Man a Commission to pu-
 blish a new Doctrine, and not give him
 wherewithal to manifest the Authority
 of his Commission to Others. *If I bear*
witness of myself, my Witness is not true,
 says our Saviour; it is probably *not*
 true in itself, it is certainly not necessa-

ry

Joh. ii.
 31.

ry to be embraced *as true*, by those, to SERM.
whom I propose it; and therefore it fol- I.
lows, *The Works that I do, they bear* 
witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Ver. 36.
me. The Miracles which a Man per-
forms, are the only convincing Argu-
ments of his being inspired; and his Own
Affirmation in this Case, when divested
of these Proofs, let it be never so Per-
emptory, cannot reasonably induce a Be-
lief of what he affirms.

Thus (for instance) when the Dispute
was in the Church of *Rome* between the
Two Orders of *Franciscans* and *Domini-*
cans, about the Immaculate Concep-
tion; One Side had Visions and Revela-
tions *for* it, and the Other Side had Visi-
ons and Revelations *against* it; but Nei-
ther Side thought themselves obliged to
take the Word of the Other; and the rest
of the World, that stood by, did not think
themselves obliged to take the Word of
Either; but believed, or disbelieved the
Immaculate Conception, according as
Reason, Scripture, and the Authority of
Tradition seemed to determine them,

SERM. and not according to the Proportion of

I. Visions and Revelations, vouched *for*, or
 *against* it.

5. It will be yet a *Fifth* Improvement of what hath been laid down, to Observe from thence, how it comes to pass, that Miracles have been so long discontinued, and do rarely, very rarely, appear in these Latter Ages of the World. They were performed at first in so Conspicuous, Exuberant, and Convincing a Manner, as to render a continual Repetition of the same Proofs utterly needless. Had indeed these *first* Evidences of a Divine Power been displayed before a *Few* only, or before *Many*, but *Suspected* Witnesses, it might have been requisite perhaps to repeat them often in succeeding Times; [as often perhaps as any single Convert to Christianity was to be made:] But being originally wrought, as you have heard, in the Face of the Sun, before a whole Nation of Witnesses, and those Witnesses Enemies; the Certainty of them was so well established, and transmitted to After-Ages; as that no
 Fair,

Fair, Impartial Considerer should be SERM.
able to doubt of it; and such an one, I.
having no Reason to dispute the Truth of *Former* Miracles, could have no Reason, no Occasion to demand *New* ones.

God governs the *Moral* World, as he doth the *Natural*. He made it indeed, and ordered it, at first, by Miracle; but he steers and conducts the Affairs of it ever since, by standing Rules and Laws, and by the Ordinary Ministry of Second Causes. And thus he established the Truth of his Revelation, at the Beginning, by Miracle; But, that being once done, he suffers things now to go on in their Regular Course, without offering every Day Motives of the same Kind to Men, but appealing to those which he hath proposed already; which he knows to be sufficient, and knows also, that if they do not suffice, no others will; according to that Remarkable Decision of our Lord's, That such as *hear not Moses and the Prophets* (i. e. Luk. xvi. 31.) reject a Revelation already well attested by

S E R M. by Miracles) *would not be persuaded,*
 I. *though one arose from the Dead. Farther,*

6. *Sixthly, from the General Drift and Tenour of the Argument we have been handling, it may be justly collected, that the more any Doctrine affects Secrecy, and declines Tryals of any Sort, the more Reason we have to Suspect, and to Examine it: Beloved, believe not every Spirit (says St. John) but try the Spirits, whether they be of God; and most particularly, those Spirits, which desire to be believed without being tried: For this looks, as if they were afraid of being brought to the Test; and Fear generally arises from a Conscioufness of Guilt, as the same Apostle, in this very Case, argues. Every one (says he) that doth Evil, hateth the Light, neither cometh to the Light, lest his Deeds should be reprov'd; but he that doth the Truth, cometh to the Light, that his Deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*

Joh. iii.
20, 21.

This Reflection cannot but once again put us in mind of those Articles of the
Roman

Roman Catholick Faith, by which it SERM.
stands distinguished from the Faith of 1.
all other Christians. We are not allow-
ed to doubt of them, or to reason upon
them. They are to be received impli-
citly, without any particular Discussion
and Enquiry: From the great Doctrine
of Infallibility they proceed, and into
that they are finally resolved: *As the* Ecclef.
Rivers run into the Sea, into the Place i. 7.
from whence the Rivers come, thither do
they return again: And how can That
which hath the Stamp of unerring Au-
thority upon it, become the proper Sub-
ject of any Man's private Debates and
Reasonings? Now this is the greatest
Prejudice imaginable against the Truth
of the Doctrines of any Church, or the
Sincerity of its Pretences: For if what
it proposeth to us, be True and Reasona-
ble, why should it decline the Exami-
nation and Judgment of Reason? If all
be pure Gold, without Alloy, how
comes it thus to fly the Touchstone?
'Tis the Property of Error only to sculk
and hide its Head; but Truth, we know,
is

S E R M. is open and barefaced ; like our first Pa-

I. rents, in the State of Innocence and
 ~ Happiness, *Naked, but not ashamed.* And
 therefore, though it be very unreasonable in the Church of *Rome* to impose her Doctrines upon us, without allowing us to examine them ; yet it is not unreasonable in Us to reject these Doctrines, thus proposed, even without Examination.

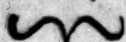
The same may be said of those Wild Opinions set up by Fanaticks and Enthusiasts, as Dictates of the Spirit, and which they will suffer to be tried by the Spirit only ; not by the dead Letter of Scripture, or by Carnal Reasoning. There needs no more than this very Consideration, to convince us of the Absurdity of their Pretences ; for if *Scripture* and *Reason* were for *Them*, They would not be *against Scripture* and *Reason* : Men do not use to decline the Arbitration of their Friends.

Far different from this is the Conduct of that excellent Church, to which we belong. She deals openly and Fairly,
 brings

brings all her Doctrines to the Light, and s E R M.
invites all her Members to search and en- I.

quire into them. She desires nothing more, than to be tried at the Bar of *un-
byassed* Reason, and to be concluded by
its Sentence: *She knows, that her Testi-
mony is true*, and that the Truth of it
will appear the more, the more it is sift-
ed. Even in those Mysteries, which She
proposes as Objects of Faith, divinely
revealed, She pretends not to shut out
the Use of Reason, but only cautions us
to exercise it Soberly and Discreetly, and
to keep it within its due Bounds: Not
to reject a Divine Truth, because we are
ignorant of the particular *Manner* in
which it may be made out; Not to rea-
son from the Properties of Finite to those
of Infinite Beings; Not to pretend to
find Contradictions in Points, the Depth
of which we cannot Fathom or Compre-
hend. Under these Restraints, She en-
courages us to use our Reason, in the
Discussion of Mysteries, as freely as we
please; and She questions not, but that
the more freely we use it, the more Rea-
son

SERM. son we shall find to believe those Myste-
 I. ries, and to revere them.



Would to God, All Men dealt as fairly with Her, as She deals with all Men ! She would not *then*, by Ill Tongues and Pens, be traduced, as guilty of Pious Cheats and Priestcraft ; Things, which She detests utterly, and hath done more toward Exposing them, where they are practised, than any of Those who make the Loudest Noise with them. She would not *then* have those Accusations of Imposture and Design, laid at her Door, which She herself hath so often and justly charged on the Church of *Rome* ; Accusations stolen, by Her Adversaries, from Her matchless Writings against that Church, and applied to Her, without Ground or Colour, without Sense or Reason. But our Comfort is, That our Case, in this respect, is like that of good *David*, when he appealed to God, and said,

Psal. lxi.
 9.

The Reproaches of Them that Reproached Thee are fallen upon Me. These Enemies of our Church are equally Enemies of all other Churches, and all Religions ; on-
 ly

ly Ours happens to be the fairest Mark, S E R M.
because it is Uppermost ; for were any I.
other set up in the Room of it, still the 
same Cry of Holy Frauds and Priestcraft
would be heard against *that* also from
the Mouths of Profligate Persons, in Li-
centious Times. To cut off all Occasi-
on, as much as can be, from those who
seek Occasion, let us be sure, all of Us,
who are Members of this Excellent
Church ; Let us be sure, I say, which is

7. The *Last* thing I have to recommend
to you from the Text, to make our Pra-
ctice of the Gospel, like the first Proofs of
it, Conspicuous and Plain ; and endea-
vour, with all our Power, to recommend
the Doctrine we embrace, to the *Hearts*
of Men, as Openly, and Powerfully by
our good Lives and Actions, as the first
Planters of it did, by their Miraculous
Performances. So shall we best put to
Silence the Ignorance of Foolish Men ;
and be able in the most convincing, and
effectual manner, to make an Answer to
our Blasphemers.

The

SERM. The *Profession* of the true and pure

I. *Doctrine of Christ*, and a *Practice* suitable to that *Profession*, are both often, in the *New Testament*, compared to *Light*. Like *That*, they display their bright Beams, and diffuse their quickening Influence; Enlightening and Enlivening all that is near, and far off; Dissipating the Mists of Vice and Ignorance, and Discovering the Hidden things of Darkness. As to our *Profession* of the pure *Doctrine* of the Gospel, that it sufficiently resembles *Light*, is manifest and notorious: Let us resemble it also in as *Illustrious* and distinguishing a *Practice*, and by *walking worthy*, every way, of that *Vocation wherewith we are called*. Let us resolve to be (as I trust we are) the *Purest Church* upon Earth, for our *Manners*, as well as for our *Doctrine*; in One respect as well as the Other, a *Light placed on a Candlestick*, and not under a *Bushe*; a *City set upon an Hill*, that cannot be hid. In a word, Let Our *Light* so shine before Men, that They, seeing our good Works, may glorify our Father which is in Heaven.

Ephes.
iv. 1.

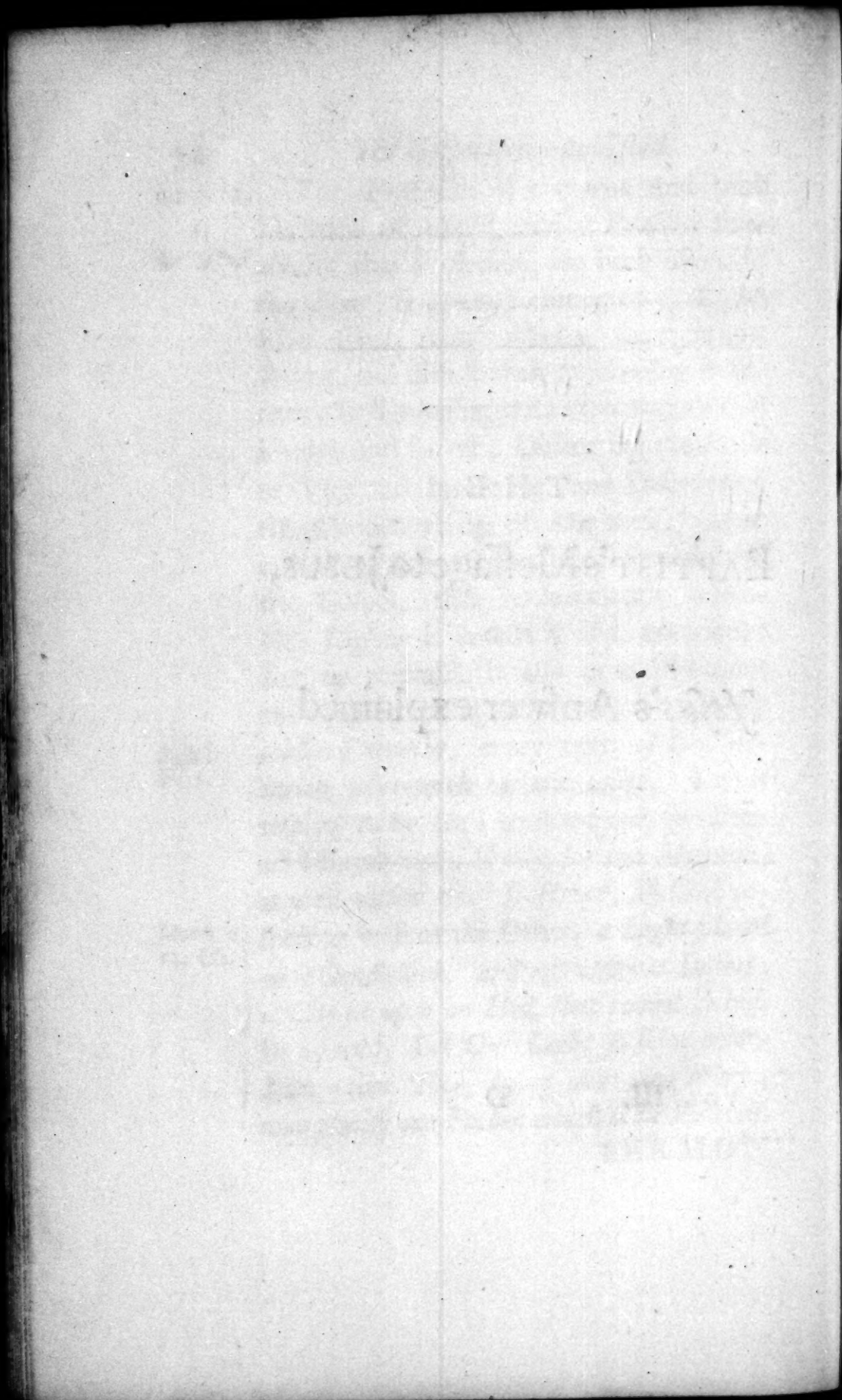
Matth. v.
14, &c.

SERMON

THE
BAPTIST'S Message to JESUS,
AND
Jesus's Answer explained.

VOL. III.

D



*The Baptist's Message to Jesus, and
Jesus's Answer explained.*

A
S E R M O N

Preached at the

R O L L S

December 24. 1710.

M A T T H. xi. 3.

*Art Thou He that should come? or do we
look for another?*

AT this time of *Advent*, particular-SERM.
ly dedicated by the Church to a II.
Devout Commemoration of our Savi-
our's Coming in the Flesh, and set apart

D 2

to

S E R M. to prepare us for a worthy Celebration

II. of the approaching Feast of his Nativity;
 it may be no Unsuitable Entertainment
 to your Thoughts, to suggest to you some
 Reflections on this Passage of Scripture,
 and those others which introduce, accompany, and explain it.

When John had heard in Prison (says the Evangelist) the Works of Christ, he sent Two of his Disciples, and said unto him, Art thou He that should come? or do we look for another? That is, Art Thou the Messiah, the great Redeemer of Israel, whose Coming was foretold by the Prophets, and is now expected with great Impatience by the whole Body of the Jews, and before whom I am sent, as his Forerunner and Harbinger? Jesus answered, and said unto them, Go, and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see. The Blind receive their Sight, the Lame walk, the Lepers are cleansed, and the Deaf hear, the Dead are raised up, and the Poor have the Gospel preached unto them. And Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me! As if he had said

said, " Judge Ye yourselves, by the S E R M.
 " Works which I now perform, whe- II.
 " ther I am the Messiah or not, or what
 " Reason there can be to doubt of my
 " Divine Mission and Authority."

This Transaction is extremely remarkable, and will afford much useful Matter to our Reflections, in relation both to the *Enquiry* made by the *Baptist*, and the *Answer* returned by our Lord to that Enquiry.

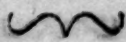
And *First*, as to the *Enquiry* itself, it I.
 may be matter of just Surprize to us, that the *Baptist* should, so long after he had continued discharging the Office of *Christ's* Harbinger, put such a Question as this to our Saviour, *Art Thou He that should come? or do we look for another?* For could *John* be Ignorant of our Saviour's Character? Could he entertain the least Doubt of it? *He*, who had formerly Baptized *Christ*, had seen the Spirit descend on him in the Form of a Dove, and heard the Voice from Heaven thus testifying concerning him, *This is my well-beloved Son, in whom I am well*
 D 3 *pleased?*

SERM. *pleased? He, who had borne Record of*

II. our Lord more than once, that he was
the Son of God, the Lamb of God, that
 Joh. i. 34.
 Ver. 29. *taketh away the Sins of the World? Could*

He possibly afterwards be under any Degree of Hesitancy or Doubt, in relation to our Saviour's Character? Certainly he could not; and therefore we must look out for some other Reason of his sending this Message, besides the Desire of satisfying himself; and that plainly was the procuring Satisfaction to those by whom the Message was sent, his Disciples and Followers, who, notwithstanding all the Affeверations of John to this purpose, continued still Incredulous; — We may suppose, for these Reasons.

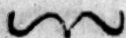
I. Because they saw their Master imprisoned, and now likely to be put to Death, for preaching up the Kingdom of God, and the Coming of the Messiah; and could not apprehend, that, had Jesus been that Messiah, he should have wanted Power, or Will to employ that Power for the Baptist's Deliverance. And yet so far was this from being the
 Case,

Case, that our Saviour doth not appear S E R M.
 once to have made an honourable Men- II.
 tion of *John*, till after the Disciples, who 
 came upon this Errand, had left him.
Then indeed, and not *before*, the Evange-
 list tell us, *Jesus began to say unto the* Matt. ix.
Multitudes, What went ye out into the Wil- 7.
derness to see? and to take that Occasion
 of enlarging on the *Baptist's* Character,
 and the Dignity of his Office.

2. They might have observed, that
 our Saviour had not himself hitherto
 asserted his Right to that Title, but de-
 clined all Occasions that had been given
 him, of directly and openly owning him-
 self to be the Messiah; which Conduct,
 though necessary, in order to carry on,
 and complete his Ministry, without In-
 terruption from the *Roman* Powers, was
 yet what the Disciples of *John*, who
 had heard their Master preaching up the
 Kingdom of the Messiah without any
 Disguise, could not understand; nor ac-
 count for any otherwise, than by suppos-
 ing that *Jesus* arrogated not that Honour
 to himself, as being conscious, that it did

SERM. not belong to him. And these Suspi-

II. cions might be raised, by their observing



3. The manner of our Saviour's Life and Conversation, which was so very different from that of their Master's, and had so much less an outward Appearance of Sanctity in it. *The One came neither Eating nor Drinking*, delighted in Solitude, and lived in the Practice of the highest Rigours and Austerities; *The Other came Eating and Drinking*, lived in the World, and according to all the innocent Customs of it; conversing freely and promiscuously with all Sorts of Men, even with Publicans and Sinners. And therefore they were tempted to think, that He, who was so far beneath their Master in what *they* called Perfection and Holiness, could not be so far above him in his Character and Office, as, if he were the Messiah, he must have been.

Mat. xi.
18.

These Doubts, it is probable, that *John* had very often endeavoured to remove: But finding that they still stuck with his Followers, he took the last and best

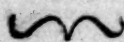
best way of satisfying them, by sending SERM.
them on this Message to *Jesus* himself, II.
and giving them by that means an Op-
portunity of being Eye and Ear Wit-
nesses of his Works, and of his Doctrine,
which, he knew, would effectually con-
vince them.

Thus much concerning the *Enquiry* :
We are now to consider,

Secondly, The *Reply* which our Saviour II.
made to it. In which Reply there are
Two Things observable; the *Manner*,
and the *Matter* of it.

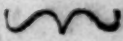
As to the *Manner* of it, we see, it is
not *Direct* and *Positive* ; but so ordered
only, as to give them an Occasion of
answering that Question themselves,
which they had proposed to our blessed
Saviour. This Method, as it was agree-
able to his Conduct in Other Cases, and
requisite to secure him from the Accu-
sations of those who watched his Words,
whenever he taught in publick ; so had
it this farther Use in it, that it imprinted
a Conviction on the Enquirers, after the
most gentle, reasonable, and winning
way,

S E R M. way, without commanding and extort-

II.  ing their Assent by an Authoritative Declaration of the Truth, which he thus invited them to receive. The Proper Motives and Evidences only were laid before them; and They afterwards were left to frame the Conclusion from thence; that so their Faith, which was to entitle them to such Glorious Privileges, might be a Free and Voluntary Act, and the Test of an Ingenuous and Well-disposed Mind.

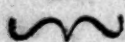
As to the *Matter* of our Saviour's Answer, *Three* things there are which deserve to be weighed by us:—The remarkable *Gradation* and *Rise* there is in the Particulars there mentioned: The *Appositeness* of it in relation to the Enquirers: And the *General* Force and Evidence of the Argument contained in it.

1. To begin with the first of these: *Go and shew John again*, says our Saviour, *those things which Ye do hear and see*; and then he particularly mentions the Bodily Cures he wrought on the Deaf and

and Blind, the Lame and the Lepers. He S E R M.
adds beyond this a yet plainer Instance II.
of a Miraculous and Divine Power,—
the Dead are raised up; and he seems
to advance still somewhat farther, when
he says, that even *the Poor have the Go-*
spel preached unto them. An Instance of
Goodness and Condescension, with which
the *Jews* had before been but little ac-
quainted! The Prophets of that Nation
had been sent always to great and migh-
ty Persons, to reclame their Princes and
Rulers, and to reprove Exemplary
Wickedness in high Places; and, to ma-
nifest the Authority of their Commission
to them, were sometimes armed with
the Power of Miracles. But nothing
could be more wonderful, than to see a
Prophet in *Jewry* preaching to the Poor
and Meek; addressing himself to the
Lowest and Meanest of Men; exhorting
them to Virtue, removing their Prejudi-
ces, and rectifying their Errors! Such
Applications amidst that People were so
unusual, and exceeding rare, that our
Saviour thought fit to conclude the Enu-
meration

S E R M. meration of the several Proofs of his Mis-

II.



fion with these two Particulars, *The Dead are raised up*, says he, *and the Poor have the Gospel preached unto them.*

2. The *Appositeness* of our Saviour's Answer, in relation to the Persons who made the Enquiry, is what we are next to consider. And here

First, we may observe, what a *Natural* Occasion he takes of resolving their Doubts, from what he was even then saying and doing in their Presence. *Go, and shew John again, those things which Ye do bear and see*: That is, you come to learn of Me, whether I am the Messiah: Your Master hath often told you, that I am; but ye will not believe him. To *Him* you should have given Ear, who is my professed Harbinger and Herald; to *Me* it belongs not so properly to proclame my own Titles, and assert my own Authority. For Joh. v. 31. *if I bear Witness of myself, my Witness is not true.* It is liable to Suspicion, and likely to be of little Weight and Authority with You. If Ye suspect your Master's

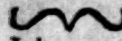
ster's Testimony of me, much more will S E R M.
ye suspect that which I give of myself. II.

Behold therefore the Testimony of God! Joh.v. 36.

for *the Works which I do* (which ye now see done before your Eyes, they) *bear Witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.* If ye still doubt, who I am, why ask ye Me? ask the Works, which you cannot doubt whether I do, or not; and they shall tell you.

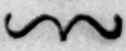
Secondly, Nothing could be better contrived to satisfy these Enquirers, of our Saviour's Preeminence over the *Baptist*, than these Wonders which they saw him perform, and heard him now appeal to; since they knew very well, that their Master had not the Gift of Miracles, nor pretended to the Power of doing them; and could not therefore but see, that his Ministry was inferior to that of *Christ*, and subordinate to it; especially since from the *Baptist's* own Mouth they had learnt, that the *doing of Miracles* should be *one* illustrious and discriminating Mark of the Messiah; for so much, I think, that Passage in the Gospel of St. *John* suffi-

S E R M. sufficiently implies,— *Many who resorted*

II. *unto Jesus, said, John did no Miracles ;*
 *but all things which John spake of this*
 Joh. x. 41. *Man, were true ;* that is, though he did

none himself, yet he prophesied that *Jesus* should do them ; and when his Disciples therefore saw that Prediction fulfilled, they were able themselves to answer their Own Question.— *Art Thou He that should come ? or do we look for Another ?* Farther

Thirdly, The Particular Facts, which our Saviour here mentions, in order to insinuate his Preeminence over the *Baptist*, are extremely well suited to that Purpose. They are all Acts of Beneficence and Kindness, wrought for the Service and Benefit of Men either for the Instruction of their Minds, or the Healing of their Bodies. And this, he tacitly suggests to them, was a far nobler Employment, and carried in it a much greater Degree of Perfection and Use, than the Solitary Life and Rigid Austerities of the *Baptist*, for which his Disciples held him in such high Veneration.
 He

He hints to them the Reasons, for which SERM.
 he lived and conversed thus publicly II.
 and familiarly, and applied himself to 
 Men in the most Humane, Easy, and Affa-
 ble Manner, without distinguishing him-
 self from Others by any rough and fright-
 ening Appearances, any thing Extraordi-
 nary and Singular, either in his Look,
 Attire, or Behaviour (for which the
Baptist was remarkable) and he leaves
 them (even in *this* respect) to consider,
 whether his Character was not superior
 to that of their Master, and his Admini-
 stration ordained to more Excellent Pur-
 poses; and therefore he concludes his
 Reply with Words, which have an Eye to
 those Prejudices they had entertained a-
 gainst him on this Account; *Blessed are*
They, who are not offended in Me!

Beyond all this, it is, in the

Fourth place, extremely remarkable,
 that the Answer of our Lord to these
 Enquiring Disciples is expressed in
 Words taken from a Prophecy of *Isaiab*
 concerning the Messiah. And *Isaiab*
 was, of all the Prophets, *He*, in whose
 Writings

S E R M. Writings the *Baptist's* Followers were

II. the most conversant, and for whom they
 ~~~~~ had the greatest Esteem and Reverence ;  
 inasmuch as their Master was there more  
 particularly pointed out, the Person and  
 Office of this Cryer in the Wilderness  
 was there more exactly described, than  
 in any other Part of the sacred Volume.  
 And therefore what *this* Prophet testified  
 concerning the Messiah, was best suited  
 to work those into a Reception of  
 him, who had been led by his Testimo-  
 ny to discern even their Master himself,  
 and to become his Followers.

Now the Places here referred to in  
*Isaiah*, are these, chap. lxi. 1. *The Spi-  
 rit of the Lord is upon me, because the  
 Lord hath appointed me to preach good  
 Tidings to the Meek.* Εὐαγγελίσασθαι τοῖς  
 πτωχοῖς, as it is in the Translation of the  
 Septuagint ; and the very same Phrase  
 is employed here in the Text, πτωχοὶ  
 εὐαγγελίζονται, *The Poor have the Gospel  
 preached unto them.* The rest of the  
 Particulars may be almost entirely sup-  
 plied from another Passage in the

XXXV<sup>th</sup>

xxxv<sup>th</sup> of the same Prophet, v. 4, 5, 6. SERM.

Behold, your God will come with Ven- II.  
geance, even God with a Recompence; he

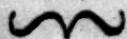
will come and save you. Then the Eyes of the Blind shall be opened, and the Ears of the Deaf shall be unstopped: Then shall the lame Man leap as an Hart, and the Tongue of the Dumb shall sing.

It is very probable that the Baptist himself might have an Eye to this Passage, when he sent his doubting Disciples with this Question to our Saviour, *Art thou he that should come?* Since we find there a Promise, within the Compass of a few Words, twice repeated, that God *would come*, and *would come* to save his People; and therefore our Saviour, very appositely sent them back again to the same Prophet in his Reply, and taught them by that means to understand the true Drift and meaning of their Master's Question. It is as if he had said, You believe not the Baptist's Testimony, that I am *He who should come*; yet surely *Isaiah*, upon whose Authority ye have received the Baptist him-



SERM. self, will find Credit with you; and *He*

II. hath thus prophesied of me.



Every way, we see the Answer of our Blessed Redeemer was so wisely and graciously contrived, as to meet with all the Prejudices, and dispel all the Doubts of these Enquirers, and to lead them into an Acknowledgment that they had found the Messiah whom they sought, *Him who was to come*, and were no longer to *look for another*.

3. Nay these Words carry in them (as I in the Third place observed) an Argument of more general Use and Influence, and propose to us all the Chief Marks and Characters of such Miracles, as are sufficient to confirm the Authority of any Person pretending to be sent by God; and all of which concurred in the Miracles done by our Messiah; as any unprejudiced Person who compares them together, may easily perceive. I shall but just mention them as they are hinted to us in the Words of our Saviour's Reply and leave the further Consideration

sideration of them to your private Meditations. Now the

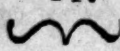
II.

1. Mark and Character of such a Miracle, as can be the proper Evidence of a Divine Mission, is, that it be above the Known Powers of all Natural Causes: And such were all the Instantaneous Cures here mentioned; and particularly the raising Men from the Dead.

2. A Second Character is, that they be done publicly and in the Face of the World, that there may be no room to suspect Artifice and Collusion. And such were the Wonders to which our Lord appealed.— *Go tell John again, says he, those Things which ye do hear and see; which are done here before your Eyes, and in the midst of a Great Multitude.*

3. A third Thing requisite is, that the Doctrine which they are brought to vouch, be every way worthy of God, and fit thus to be Sealed and Attested by him. *The Gospel is preached, says our Lord; the most perfect Scheme of Morality that ever Mankind was acquainted with.*

S E R M. 4. It is yet a further Recommendation

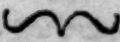
II.  on of such Miracles, If they carry in them Marks not only of an Astonishing Power, but of Good Will also, and Beneficence to Men; as the Healing of the Blind, the Lepers, and the Lame, here in the Text, manifestly did.

5. If the very doing of them was foretold, and the Time and Person declared by the Spirit of Prophecy; for so I have shewn that our Saviour, in his Account of the mighty Works here done, referred himself to the Predictions of *Isaiab.*

6. If there be no Appearances of Self-interest and Design in the Worker of such Miracles; and this Objection our Lord also removes, where he says, that the *Poor had the Gospel preached unto them*; the *Poor*, to whom no Man would apply, who proposed to himself Temporal Views and Aims, which *They* (alas!) could no ways forward.

Thus have I endeavoured to open to you, very largely, the Significancy of each Word in this Important Passage;  
and



and particularly the wonderful Address SERM.  
of our Lord, in applying himself to II.  
those who resorted to him for Instruction,   
and in reasoning them into Conviction  
by Arguments and Suggestions peculi-  
arly accommodated to the Notions and  
Apprehensions they were under. —

Our Chief Business indeed, from such  
Places as these, is, to inculcate into  
the Minds of *Christians* the *Practical*  
Lessons of Piety contained in the Gospel;  
to convince them of the Reasonableness,  
Beauty, and Usefulness of those Pre-  
cepts; and to inflame them with ardent  
Desires of excelling therein. However,  
such *Speculative* Enquiries as these have  
also their Use, and may sometimes de-  
serve a Place in your Minds; as contri-  
buting to raise your Attention in perus-  
ing the several Parts of Holy Writ, and  
to improve and quicken you in your  
Manner of meditating upon them; and  
as assisting you towards a Discovery of  
those Inestimable Treasures of Divine  
Wisdom, which are hidden in that Sa-  
cred Volume. We generally, I fear,

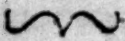
S E R M. consult the Scriptures too negligently,  
 II. and reflect on them too superficially,  
 with no greater Degree of Attention  
 and Care, than we employ in perusing  
 mere Human Composures (and I would  
 to God we employed always as much in  
 the One Case as in the other!) We do  
 not sufficiently consider, *Who* it is that  
 speaks to us there, nor *What* it is that he  
 says: What Weight, What Fulness of  
 Sense, What Excellent Variety of Mat-  
 ter, and Wonderful Depth of Thought  
 there must needs be in Words dictated  
 by, or at least spoken under the over-  
 ruling Influence of Infinite Wisdom,  
 And therefore, though the Scriptures are  
 read every Day in our Churches (and  
 sometimes perhaps consulted in our Clo-  
 sets) yet we make but a slow Proficiency  
 towards a True Taste, and a Clear Dis-  
 cernment of those high Truths which  
 are contained in them. We dwell on  
 the Letter only, on what offers itself to  
 us at the first View; but we do not make  
 ourselves acquainted with the Life and  
 Spirit of them. And yet for this Rea-  
 son,

son, among Others, these Holy Writ- S E R M.  
ings were left us by God, that we might, II.  
as good *David* speaks, *exercise ourselves*  
*in them Day and Night*, have perpetual  
Matter for our Enquiries into, and Im-  
provements in the Knowledge of things  
Divine, and drink always of these Wa-  
ters of Life, without either allaying our  
Thirst, or exhausting the Spring from  
whence they flow.

The Difference between the Holy  
Scriptures, and other Writings, is much  
the same, as that between the Works of  
Art and Nature. The Works of Art  
appear to most Advantage at first; but  
will not bear a Nice and Repeated Ex-  
amination: The more curiously we pry  
into them, the less we shall admire  
them. But the Works of Nature will  
bear a thousand Views, and Reviews,  
and yet still be Instructive, and still Won-  
derful. In like manner, the Writings of  
mere Men, though never so excellent in  
their Kind, yet strike and surprize  
us most upon our first Perusal of them;  
and then flatten upon our Taste by de-



SERM. grees, as our Familiarity with them in-

II.  creases. Whereas the Word of Revelation is like its Author, of an Endless and Unsearchable Perfection; and the more we look into it, and revolve it in our Minds, the more Reason still shall we find to admire and adore the Wisdom of the Great Revealer of it.

I have therefore hinted to you some Thoughts concerning the Drift of our Saviour's Reasoning, and the peculiar Appositeness of it in relation to the Persons who made the Enquiry in the Text; that I might excite you from thence to meditate in like manner on the Other Parts of the Book of God, which are equally *profitable for Doctrine, and able to make us Wise unto Salvation, through Faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

2 Tim.  
iii. 15.

Wherefore, *search the Scriptures*, for as *in Them ye have Eternal Life*, so have ye Room also for an Eternal Growth and Improvement in that Knowledge, which leads to it; in that Knowledge, which we can here attain unto in Part only, but shall hereafter, when the Veil of this  
Flesh

Flesh is done away, more perfectly com- S E R M.  
prehend ; and the more earnestly we a- II.  
spire after it, and labour for it in this  
State of Imperfection, the more Exalted  
a Degree of it shall we possess in Ano-  
ther World. And do Thou, " Blessed  
" Lord, who hast caused All Holy  
" Scriptures to be written for our In-  
" struction, grant that we may in such  
" wise read, mark, learn, and inward-  
" ly digest them, that by Patience and  
" Comfort of thy Holy Word we may  
" embrace and ever hold fast the blef-  
" sed Hope of Everlasting Life, which  
" thou hast given us in our Saviour Je-  
" sus Christ."





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ON THE  
INCARNATION  
OF OUR  
*L O R D.*

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OF THE  
INCARNATION  
OF OUR  
LORD

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A  
S E R M O N  
O N T H E

*Incarnation of our Lord:*

Preached at the

R O L L S

On Christmas Day, 1710.

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M A T T H. xi. 6.

*Blessed is He whosoever shall not be of-  
fended in Me.*

A N D can any Man then be offend- S E R M.  
ed in Thee, blessed *Jesu!* who I I I.  
hast undertaken, and done, and suffered  
so much for all Men! Who willingly  
emptiedst



SERM. emptiedst thyself of all thy Glory, left-

III. est Heaven and the Bosom of thy Father,  
 ~~~~~ for our Sakes; and, when thou tookest  
 upon thee to deliver Man, didst not (as
 at this time) abhor the Virgin's Womb!
 Can a Design of so much Goodness ever
 miscarry by the Folly of those, on
 whose very Account it was undertaken!
 Can such a Message of Love (of a Love
 astonishing and infinite) be rejected!—
 Canst Thou thyself, the great Messen-
 ger, be received any otherwise, than
 with the open Arms and Hearts of all
 thy Creatures, for whose Redemption
 thou wert thus made Flesh, and dweltst
 among Us!——Is it possible for any *One*
 of them to be any ways offended in
 • Thee!

Yet so it is, Blessed Lord! that from
 thy first Coming in the Flesh to this
 time, there have been unreasonable Men
 all along, that have taken Offence at
 Thee!— And there will not fail to be
 such within the Pale of Christianity it-
 self, even till thy second Coming to
 judge the World!—— Thy Doctrines
 have

have been complained of, as laying too S E R M.
great a Restraint on Human Nature, as III.
hard and unpracticable Sayings!— Thy 
Myſteries have been doubted of, diſput-
ed againſt, and ridiculed by Men of
perverſe and proud Minds, who are re-
ſolved to believe nothing farther than
they can throughly and clearly compre-
hend it!— Thy Perſon itſelf, the Cir-
cumſtances and Way of thy Coming
have been an Offence unto Many!— To 1 Cor. i.
the Jews a Stumbling-block, and to the ^{23.}
Greeks Fooliſhneſs! A conſtant Occaſion
of Falling to all Godleſs and Sinful
Men, whoſe high Minds are not brought
into Captivity to the Obedience of Faith,
nor made fit for the Reception of the
Truth, as it is in *Jeſus*!— But bleſſed
are all they (have thy Holy Lips pro-
nounced) who (in none of theſe Ways)
are offended in Thee!

As to the two former Ways of being
offended in *Chriſt*, on the Account of
the Difficulty of practiſing thoſe Duties
he has enjoined, and believing thoſe Ar-
ticles of Faith he hath propoſed, I
ſhall

S E R M. shall not at present enter into the Confide-

III. ration of them. The Festival we are now
 celebrating, determines me rather to point my Reflections on the Offence which has been taken at the *Person* of Christ, the *Method*, and *Manner* of his Coming amongst Us.—The Objections of which Kind I shall briefly propose, and answer; that so having rooted and grounded ourselves in a firm Belief of the Doctrine, we may, with the more Assurance, make those several Improvements of it, which will be profitable unto Godliness.

It hath formerly by *Porphyry* and *Celsus*, and ever since by their Successors, the open or hidden Enemies of Christianity, been thus argued:

That the Doctrine of the Incarnation of the Son of God is *Unreasonable* and *Incredible*; inconsistent with the clear Notions we have of the unlimited Perfections of God, and the finite Properties of Man; between which there is so Wide and Eternal a Difference, as seems to render them incapable of being joined

ed together in one and the same Person S E R M.
or Subject. For how can Wisdom, Per- III.
fection, and Happiness itself be mixed
with Folly, Infirmary, and Misery?
What Union can there be between what
is Finite, and that which is Infinite?

But were it conceivable, how the Divine and Human Nature could be United into *One Person*; yet is it not (say they) *reasonable* to believe that such a *Method* was actually taken. For surely there were *other* ways, beside this, of Restoring lapsed Man to the Favour of God, and that Happiness which he had forfeited, and of taking away the Sins of the World: The unlimited Mercy of the Divine Nature was of itself sufficient to compass this End, and forgive this Debt, without requiring any Ransom; and unless a *God Incarnate* were *absolutely and indispensably* requisite to free Mankind from the Guilt and Dominion of their Sins, it is no ways reasonable to think, that Recourse was had to so extraordinary a Remedy.

SERM.

III.

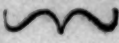
Now, as to the first Part of the Objection, the *Impossibility* of an Union between God and Man in the same Person or Subject, 'tis a bold, and a presumptuous Plea. For who is he, among the Reasoners of this World, that is able precisely to determine, in such obscure Points as these, what is *possible* or *impossible* to be accomplished by Almighty Wisdom and Power? Are our Notions of these two Beings, *God* and *Man*, so full every way, and distinct and clear, as to satisfy us, that such an Union is in itself repugnant, and altogether impossible? Would we impartially consider, what passes within our Minds, when we employ them in such nice Disquisitions as these, we should find, that all that passes there is Darkness and Confusion; and that we can discern too little of either of these Natures, to be able to pronounce, with any Assurance, that it is *impossible* for them to be joined together in One Person.

We have no just Idea indeed of the *Manner*, in which such an Union may be

be effected ; but so neither have we of SERM.
the *Manner* of that Union, which is III.
between our Souls and Bodies. An
Union, which we can as little explain,
or comprehend, as even that of the De-
ity with the Humanity ; and which yet
we can no more doubt of, than we can
of our own Being and Subsistence. Will
the most Keen and Piercing Wit among
the Sons of Men say, that he perceives
plainly, how a *Corporeal* can be joined
to an *Incorporeal* Being ; and what are those
common Ties and Ligaments that hold
them ; how they act upon each other ;
move, and are moved by Turns ; and
what kind of Contact that is, by which
such Motions are mutually communi-
cated ? No, these are Secrets, which
we can no ways, by any Strength of
Thought fathom ; and which perhaps
we should have been apt to imagine
inconsistent and impossible Speculati-
ons, had not *Experience* taught us,
that Things *are* really so, though we
cannot possibly find out *how* they *should*
be so.

SERM. Had the Spirits of Men been once
 III. unbodied, and had God revealed to
 them in that State of Separation, that
 he designed them for another Station in
 a Lower World; and, in order to it,
 would clothe them with gross and sen-
 sible *Matter*, and make them act continu-
 ally in Concert with fleshly Organs, and
 with Dependence upon them, No
 doubt but one of these *Forward Rea-*
soners would have concluded immedi-
 ately, that the Thing proposed was *Un-*
philosophical and *Absurd*.—And there-
 fore, that either the Revelation did not
 really come from God, or that this could
 not be the Sense of it.—For how could
 Body and Spirit, Things so totally diffe-
 rent, any ways meet together, and com-
 pose one entire Subject? or how could
 they, when thus met, have any possible
 Influence on each other?

These therefore are immodest and
 unjustifiable Ways of Reasoning, which
 would persuade us to reject Truths,
 on the Account of some *Supposed Im-*
possibilities, of which it is *manifestly im-*
possible

possible that we should have any clear SERM.
 and adequate Conception. And there- III.
 fore in all such Cases, it becomes not us 
 to say, what can, or cannot be done,
 or what the Nature of Things will, or
 will not admit of. The Short and only
 Sure Point, upon which Controversies
 of this kind must turn, is, to see what
 God in his Holy Word has assured us
 concerning them.

As to the second Part of the Objec- 2
 tion, That there were *Other* Ways of
 bringing about the Pardon of Sin, and
 the Salvation of Man; far be it from us
 to prescribe to God, or to say—That
 Infinite Goodness and Wisdom itself
could have found out *no Other* Expedi-
 ent. But since *this*, and *no other*, was
 made use of by God, we must needs
 think it the *most proper* of *Any*, and the
 best proportioned to those Ends and Pur-
 poses, for which He designed it. And
 though it becomes us rather implicitly to
 adore the Divine Wisdom, than curi-
 ously to enquire into the Reasons, and
 boldly to sound the Depths of it; yet is

S E R M. there some Light afforded us in Scripture, whereby we may discover a mighty
 III. *Fitneſs* and *Congruity* between the *Method* that was uſed, and the *End* that was brought about by it.

Guiding ourſelves therefore by the Discoveries made to us on this Head in Holy Writ, we may ſafely venture to ſay—It was fit and requiſite, that our Redeemer ſhould be *God*, that, by the Infinite Dignity of his Perſon, the Value of the Sacrifice, which he made of himſelf in the Fleſh, might be ſo far enhanced, as to become a ſufficient Atonement for the Sins of the whole World : That the *Laws* which he ſhould publiſh, might carry in them the utmoſt Obligation and Force : That his *Doctrine* might have the higheſt Authority : That we being aſſured of his abſolute Security from Sin, might look up to his *Example*, as to a *perfect Pattern* of Holineſs ; and in all things, without *Doubt*, or *Fear*, implicitly follow his Steps.

It was fit he ſhould be *God*, that he might give an Inſtance of *Infinite Condeſcenſion*

descension and *Love* toward us, and might SERM.
 from thence engage us to *Love* and *Obe*III.
 him also, *without Bounds* : That he might
 be enabled in our behalf to Vanquish *Sa-*
tan, and all the Powers of Hell, and
 erect a Spiritual Kingdom in the Hearts of
 Men, by triumphing first over all the
 Strength, and Cunning, and Malice of
 our Spiritual Enemies.

It was highly Expedient also, that he
 should be *Man*, that our Offences might
 be repaired in that *Nature* which com-
 mitted them : And *as by one Man's Dis-* Rom. v.
obedience, many were made Sinners ; so by ^{19.}
the Obedience of One Man, Many might be
made Righteous.

That he might be Qualified from
 thence, to be a *Merciful and Faithful* Heb. ii.
High Priest in Things pertaining to God, ^{17.}
 and a proper *Intercessor* with him for
 Man, whose Infirmities he had tried,
 whose Needs he had been sensible of ;
 and, having *himself suffered and been* Ver. 18.
tempted, might be *able* and willing to
succour Those that are tempted.

SERM. *Lastly*, That by appearing in Human

III. Form, he might make a Difference between the rigorous and astonishing Dispensation of the *Law*, and that milder one of *Grace* : Coming to us in the most familiar and winning way : Instructing us in our Duty like one of us : And proposing to us a lively and Full Example of what he taught, in what he did and suffered for us.

These are some of the Accounts which God has hinted to us in Scripture, why his Infinite Wisdom was pleased to pitch upon this Way, rather than any other, of reconciling Man to himself. And yet, after all the Accounts we can give ourselves of it, we cannot but confess it to be an Abyſs of Mercy, which neither *We* nor *Angels* are able to pry into ; and which God alone who contrived it, can fully explain and comprehend.

Let us forbear therefore to wade farther into the Depth of this great Mystery of *God manifest in the Flesh* ; and let us satisfy ourselves with believing it, as God has revealed it, without indulging
our

our Curiosity in an unprofitable Search S E R M.
after the Reasons, which induced God III.
to order the Stupendous Work of our 
Redemption in so inſconceivable a Man-
ner: And let us proceed to draw from
thence thoſe plain practical Improve-
ments, which may render it profitable
unto Godlineſs, and with which it will
readily furniſh us.

And the firſt, and moſt natural Uſe
we are to make of it, is, to raiſe to our-
ſelves from thence Matter of *Thankful-
neſs and Spiritual Joy*. *Behold, I bring* Luk. ii.
you, ſaid the Angel to the Shepherds, 10, 11.
*good Tidings of great Joy which ſhall be
to all People: For unto you is born this
Day in the City of David a Saviour,
which is Chriſt the Lord.* And theſe in-
deed are the beſt Tidings that ever God
ſent, or the World received: Tidings
of no leſs than Freedom from the Guilt
and Punishment of Sin; of a Way o-
pened to Repentance, and the Favour
of God; to Peace of Conſcience in this
World, and Everlaſting Happineſs in
the next.

Before

SERM. Before the Coming of *Christ*, all the

III. Account we could have of these things
 from the Light of Nature, went no farther than this.— That the Breach of any of God's Laws brought Guilt along with it; and that Guilt made us liable to Punishment.— Whether God, upon any Considerations, would ever remit this Punishment, was more than mere Reason could possibly tell us. For the Justice of God certainly required, that Sin should be followed with Punishment: Nor was this inconsistent with the Goodness of God, which was otherwise sufficiently manifested to us. Under these kind of Dark and Uncomfortable Reasonings were we left, till Christ *the Sun of Righteousness* arose with Healing in his Wings, and published the Gospel of Repentance, and Remission of Sins. All Thanks and Praise therefore be given to him, that our Tongues can possibly express, or our Hearts conceive! *Abraham*, at a mighty Distance, and upon a very Dim and Imperfect View of it, *rejoyced to see this Day*: The Angels, who them-

Mal. iv.
2.

John viii.
56.

themselves had no Interest in this Deliberance, yet were highly pleased with the Prospect of those Blessings it derived on their Fellow Creature, Man; and therefore sang that Hymn on this Occasion, which the Evangelist has recorded.— *Glory be to God on High, on Earth Peace, Good-will towards Men.* SERM. III.

And shall not *We*, for whose Sake this Peace was sent on Earth, and to whom all this Good-will was meant, shall not *We* also give *Glory to God on High, and rejoice before him with Reverence?* Surely *this* is News, at which (as *Isaiab* prophesies of the Miraculous Effects that should take place in the Kingdom of the Messiah) *the Lame Man should leap as an Hart, and the Tongue of the Dumb should sing.* Luke ii. 14. Isa. xxxv. 6.

A second Improvement that should be made of this Doctrine, is, to raise our *Love* to God from hence, to all the Degrees of which it is capable.

For Love surely deserves Returns of Love; and the highest Instances of Love, the highest Returns of it. Now

SERM. *in this was manifested the Love of God to-*

III. *ward us, because that God sent his only be-*

gotten Son into the World, that we might
 1 Joh. iv. *live through him. Herein is Love (as*
 9, 10.

St. John continues his Argument) Not that We loved God (that is, loved God first, and by that means drew down his Love upon us) but that He loved us (antecedently, freely) and sent his Son to be the Propitiation for our Sins.

Had God sent the meanest Attendant in the Court of Heaven, to publish abroad the good Tidings of his free and voluntary Pardon of Sin, should we not have entertained it as a Message of unspeakable Love! How much more, when he sends his Son, his only begotten Son, on this Errand! When he sends him to partake of our Nature, and of all the Infirmities, Miseries, Shame, and Pain that attend it; and at last to be made a Sacrifice for our Sins by the very Hands of those Men, for whose Sake he left Heaven! This raises the Motive so high, that our Lips are faint when we speak of it; and our Heart melts away almost under

der the Sense of that excessive Burthen SERM.
of Love which lies upon us. III.

But how strangely is the Force of 
this Motive weakened by those who
make *Christ* a mere Man, not the Eter-
nal Son of God, sent out to us from the
Bosom of his Father! For at this rate
the *Love of God* toward us abates very
much; and then, I am afraid, *Ours* to-
ward Him will proportionably abate
with it. For the higher Apprehensions
we have of God's Antecedent Love to
Man, the stronger will our Endeavours
still be to raise our Affections up to a
Pitch some way suitable to those Ap-
prehensions.

So that, whether these Men have, by
this Expedient, lessened the Difficulties
of their *Faith*, or not (which is Matter
of Dispute) sure we are, that they have
evidently lessened the Argument for their
Love by it.

Another plain Use we are to make of
this Doctrine, is, to give us an *high Sense*
of the *Dignity of our Nature*, and an
hearty

S E R M | hearty *Displeasure* at those Sins which
 III. | debase and dishonour it.

Behold now, as the Apostle to the
Hebrews argues, is that Prophecy of the
Psalmist concerning *Man* fulfilled in your
 Heb. ii. 7, Ears. — *Thou hast crowned him with
 Glory and Honour, and hast set him over
 the Works of thine Hands : Thou hast put
 all Things in Subjection under his Feet ;*
 that is, The *Human Nature*, by its As-
 sumption to the *Divine*, is now advanc-
 ed far above Principalities and Powers,
 and every created Being : Nay, it is, in
 the *Person of Christ*, become an *Object of
 Adoration*, even to Spirits of the first
 Rank and Order. For, as the same Apo-
 stle interprets another Passage of the
 Heb. i. 6, *Psalmist*, *When God brought his first be-
 gotten Son into the World, he saith, Let
 all the Angels of God worship him.*

Should not such a Reflection as this
 make us resolve to do nothing beneath
 that Nature, which God has so highly
 honoured ? Not to pollute it with vile
 Affections and Lusts ; Not to set it up-
 on mean and unworthy Pursuits, and
 on

on minding *Earthly Things*; but to have SERM.
 our *Conversation in Heaven*; from whence III.
 also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Je- Phil. iii.
 sus Christ, who shall change our *Vile Body*, 19, 20, 21.
 that it may be fashioned like unto his *Glo-*
rious Body?

A Sense of Birth and Noble Blood
 will often keep Men from doing things
 beneath themselves, when no other Mo-
 tive can restrain them: And shall it not
 be sufficient to preserve us from every
 Evil and defiling Work, to consider our
 near *Alliance* with God himself, by the
 Intervention of the *Man Christ Jesus*?
 Surely such a Consideration should en-
 gage us, after the most powerful Man-
 ner, to *purify our Natures*, even as his 2 Cor.
is pure; and to *cleanse ourselves from all* vii. 1.
Filthiness of Flesh and Spirit.

And as God's assuming our Nature
 should make us reflect often on the Dig-
 nity and Worth of it, and resolve not
 to defile *That* with base and brutish
 Enjoyments, which *Christ* hath thus En-
 nobled and Sanctified; so, on the other
 hand,

The

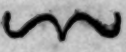
S E R M. The *Condescension* also of the Son of

III.

God, in this Mysterious Work of our Redemption, should infuse into us a Spirit of *Universal Humility*. Since He, *who*

Heb. i. 3. *was the Brightness of his Father's Glory, and the express Image of his Person*, emptied himself willingly of all that Glory, to become a Vile and Miserable Creature for the Salvation of Men; what a deep Lowliness of Mind ought *We* (in Imitation of him) to carry about us, through the several Stages of Life, and the different Administrations of Providence? How willing should it make us to undertake any Work, to be seen in any Office, though never so mean and low, that tends any way to the Good and Welfare of Mankind? It is the

Phil. ii. Great Apostle's Argument, *Let nothing*
 3, 4, 5, 6, *be done*, says he, *through Strife, or Vain-*
 7, 8. *glory; but in Lowliness of Mind, let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every Man on his own things, but every Man also on the Things of others. Let this Mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus; Who being in the Form*
 of

of God, thought it not Robbery to be equal SERM.
with God; but made himself of no Repu- III.
tation, and took upon him the Form of a 
Servant: And being found in Fashion as a
Man, he humbled himself, and became o-
bedient unto Death, even the Death of the
Cross.

A *Fifth* thing I would recommend to
you, from considering the Incarnation
of *Christ*, is, that we would take care
to trace all the Steps of that *Example*
which he set us in the *Flesh*; and which
that he might set us, was one great
End of his taking our Nature upon
him. And, Oh! let not *this End* be
frustrated, by our neglecting to look up
to that admirable Pattern of all Virtue
and Holiness in the *Life* of the Immacu-
late *Jesus*, which the four Gospels have
afforded us! A *Life*, as useful to be
handed down to us in all its Circum-
stances, as his very *Precepts* themselves.
For in *that* he exemplified his Precepts,
and gave an Instance of the Practicable-
ness, the Beauty, and the Power of
them. Such an Instance, as charms the

S E R M. Eyes, and engages the Hearts of all
 III. that behold it; and will, if well attend-
 ed to, have the same Influence upon *us*,
 that the enjoying the immediate View
 of God, Face to Face, once had upon
Moses: It will make us shine with Part
 of that Lustre we are looking upon, and
 transform us into some Kind of Resem-
 blance with it. *We all with open Face,*
 2 Cor. iii. 18. *beholding as in a Glass the Glory of the Lord,*
 that is, viewing carefully the Image of
 our Lord's Life, as it is drawn to us in
 the Glass of the Evangelists, and study-
 ing to express it in ourselves, *we shall*
be changed (as it follows) *into the same*
Image from Glory to Glory; from one
 Degree of Virtue and Perfection to ano-
 ther, till at last *we arrive at the very*
 Ephes. iv. 13. *Measure of the Stature of the Fulness of*
Christ.

I shall mention but one Improvement
 more of the Doctrine of the Day, and
 then conclude.—And that is, that we
 should take Occasion from hence, highly
 to esteem and reverence the Evangelical
 Dispensation: To value and prize that
 Everlasting

Everlasting Gospel, which *Christ* sealed S E R M.
to us with his Blood, above all other III.
Books, Religions and Philosophies; a-
bove all other Methods of Living and
Dying that have been ever taught, or
practised in the World.

Were there nothing contained in it
but that one *faithful Saying*, worthy of 1 Tim. i.
all Acceptation, that *Christ Jesus* came 15.
into the World to save Sinners; even that
should recommend it more to us, and
make us take greater Delight in perus-
ing it, than turning over all the Volumes
of Wit and Reason, all the Discourses
of Moral Virtue, all the Treatises of
Arts and Sciences, which the Learned
Part of Mankind among the *Gentiles*
have afforded us: We should count them
all but Dross and Dung, in comparison
of the Excellency of the Knowledge of
Christ Jesus. Phil. iii. 8.

But the best Expression of our Reve-
rence towards this Gospel, is, to com-
ply with the Terms of it. Let us re-
member, that the last Scope of the whole
Mystery of Godliness, is, to oblige Man-

SERM. kind to be good and virtuous; and to
III. lead Lives answerable to such bright
Discoveries and Motives, as Revelation
has proposed to us. And therefore let
me exhort and beseech every one of you
this Day, as ye would not (as far as in
you lies) frustrate the Design of our Sa-
viour's Birth; as ye would not baffle
the Truth of those Prophecies concern-
ing the Innocence and Purity of the
Lives of Men under the Reign of the
Messiah; and as ye would not *hereafter*
wish, that your Saviour had never been
born, nor you yourselves neither; to be
careful for your Parts to answer the
great End of his Incarnation, and to live
as becomes a People, that have been thus
Redeemed of the Lord.

*For how shall ye escape, if ye neglect so
great Salvation?*

TEMPTATIONS
NOT
IRRESISTIBLE.

G 3

THE TENTATIONS

IRRESISTIBLE

Temptations not Irresistible.

A
S E R M O N

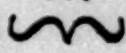
Preached at

St. James's Chapel,

February 16. 1710-11.

I COR. x. 13.

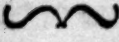
*God is faithful, who will not suffer you
to be tempted above that ye are able,
but will with the Temptation also make
a Way to escape.*

A MONG the various Methods S E R M.
made use of by Men, to justify I V.
or extenuate their Sinful Compliances, 

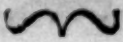
G 4

there

S E R M. there is no Plea more common in the

IV. Mouths of Libertines, than This; That,  considering the Weakness of Human Nature, and the Strength of some Temptations, 'tis not to be expected that we should get the better of them. The strict Rules of Virtue are indeed enjoined us: but in this State of Frailty and Infirmary, we must (say they) be sometimes allowed to deviate from them. We are solicited so powerfully by Evil Objects *without*, and pushed on so violently by Evil Inclinations *within*, that 'tis impossible but that *both* these should now and then prevail, against the best Reasons, and the strongest Resolutions. This is an Opinion with which Sensual Men usually flatter themselves; wish true first, and believe true afterwards. But how Vain and Groundless an Opinion it is, the Determination of the Apostle, in the Words of the Text, may inform us, *God is faithful, &c.*

The plain Purport of which Words is, "That God adjusts always, and
" proportions the Strength of Tempta-
" tions

“ tions to our Power of resisting them, S E R M.
“ and never lays a greater Burthen upon I V.
“ us, than he either *finds*, or *makes* us 
“ able to bear.”

A very Important and Comfortable Truth! of great Use to support the Truly *Good and Pious* under the various Evils of Life, and Allurements of Sense, which surround them; and to reclaim the *Bad*, who indulge themselves in Vice, upon the supposed Impossibility of being entirely Virtuous and Blameless, from their False and Carnal Reasonings.

In order therefore to Strengthen and Encourage the *One*, and to Convince and Undeceive the *Other*, I shall make it my Business in what follows,

First, To *Explain* and *State* this Truth. I.

Secondly, To *Confirm* it by sundry II.
Ways of *Proof*, with which *Experience*,
Reason, and *Revelation* will furnish us
And then

Thirdly,

SERM.

IV.

III. *Thirdly*, To Apply it, in a few plain Words of *Exhortation* and *Reproof*, such as the *Argument* naturally suggests, and the *Time* will permit me to make use of.

I. *First*, I shall Explain and State this Truth.

And in order to it, I observe

I. That the Apostle is not speaking of the Powers of *mere* Human Nature, but of Human Nature *Divinely assisted and supported*. He says not, that a Man, of *himself*, hath Strength enough to resist all Inducements to Sin, and to stand his Ground (as the *Pelagians* afterwards vainly talked) but that he shall be *enabled* to do this, in virtue of a *Superior Principle*, and by the Help of *Divine Grace*; which, in such Exigencies, shall surely be bestowed on him. *God* (he says) *will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able.*—Intimating, that we *should* be tempted above what we are able, if *God* did not interpose and help us. And again,

again, *God will with the Temptation also* SERM.
make a Way to escape; Which implies, IV.
that we often could not escape, unless 
God made a Way for us.—I observe

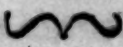
2. From the Subject of the Apostle's Discourse, that neither is it his Intention to affirm, that we shall, by any Measure of Divine Grace imparted to us in this Life, be so far enabled to baffle all *manner* of Temptations, as to live *perfectly Spotless and Sinless*; but only, that we shall be preserved from falling into *Great and Heinous, into Deliberate and Presumptuous Sins*; such as, when Committed, throw us out of the Favour of God, lay waste the Conscience, and require a particular and Solemn Repentance, to render us capable of Salvation. For such was that Sin, which the *Corinthians*, at this time, were in danger of Committing, a Compliance with Idolaters, in partaking of their Idol Feasts. Alas! it cannot be otherwise, but that, in the very best of Men, Sins of Omission and Infirmary should abound. Let us stand never so much upon our Guard, there
will

S E R M. *will* be Lapses, there *will* be Inadverten-

IV. *cies*, there *will* be Surprizes: All there-
 fore that we can in this State of Imper-
 fection depend on, is, That through the
 Grace of God we shall be preserved
 from such Enormous Offences, as are
 inconsistent with a Sincere Piety, and
 Habitual Holiness; not that we shall be
 totally freed from Human Frailties and
 Failings.— Farther

3. This *Supernatural* Assistance,
 which enables us to resist Temptations,
supposes our Use of *Natural* Means,
 and our *Concurrence* with it to the best of
 our Power. 'Tis a *Co-operating* Cause,
 which acts only in *proportion* to our own
 Endeavours; but imparts not its *Extra-*
ordinary sustaining Strength and Virtue,
 unless where we exert, and make use of
 that *ordinary* Strength we have. Tem-
 ptations therefore to the most Gross and
 Grievous Sins may, in *some* Circum-
 stances, be *Irresistible*; if it were Orig-
 nally our *own* Fault, that we were
 brought into *those* Circumstances; if,
 for want of that due Vigilance and Care,
 which

which we were *obliged* and *able* to em- S E R M.
ploy, the Temptation overtook us. IV.

For Instance ; If a Man of resolved 
Sobriety, should be so far at any time off
his Guard, as to Indulge himself in any
unjustifiable Degree of Excess, he may,
by that means, be inevitably betrayed
into some of the Ill Consequences of
Intemperance ; If a Person, by Nature
warm and passionate, shall mix in high
Disputes, or engage in Games of Chance,
'tis not to be expected that he should
preserve himself free from Offence. His
Passions will, of Course, be agitated,
and inflamed ; his *Heart* will now and
then *think*, and his Mouth *utter perverse* Prov.
things. But there is no Objection from xxiii. 33.
these, and such Instances as these, against
the Doctrine laid down, which affirms
all Temptations to be Conquerable.
For this is to be understood only of *such*
as we Unavoidably fall into, not of *such*
as we voluntarily seek. It is not sup-
posed, that we should have Power always
to *Resist*, unless we before-hand do what
is in our Power to *Shun* Temptation.

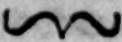
These

S E R M. These are the several Restrictions, under which the *Truth* implied in the Text must be understood. Which having thus *Explained* and *Stated*, I go on now, in the

II. *Second Place, to Confirm by Various Ways of Proof, such as Experience, Reason, or Revelation will suggest to us.*

And the first Way of proving it, shall be by *Experience*.

In vain do Libertines pretend, that Human Nature is too weak and frail to resist, what we have Authentick Proof, that, as weak and frail as it is, it *hath* oftentimes resisted. There is no Temptation, either of Desire, or Fear, of Pleasure, or Pain, nothing that can either *Allure* us to Sin, or *Scare* us from our Duty, but what hath been actually withstood and baffled by those Holy Men and Women that have gone before us: And what *hath* been already done, *may* be repeated; unless Human Nature be

a different thing *now*, from what it was S E R M.
then; which no one, I suppose, will IV.
pretend. 

Can a Man look up to the Examples of the Primitive *Christians*? Can he reflect on the Lives and Deaths of the Saints, Martyrs, and Confessors of old; on what they *did*, and what they *suffered*; and pretend to say, after this, that any Solicitations of Sense are irresistible, any Part of Virtue is impracticable.

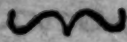
Were they not Men of the *same* Passions and Infirmities as we are? Had they not the *same* Sense of Pleasure and Pain? Were they not surrounded with the *same* tempting Objects? And had they *any* Assistances, in order to stand their Ground, but from that *Holy Spirit*, who will assist *Us* also? And why then should *We* be forced to yield to those Difficulties, over which *They* triumphed?

Let us consider some few of those many plain Instances of this Kind, which are recorded in the Holy Story. The Temptation of *Example* and Reign-
ing

SERM. ing *Custom*, is one of the strongest that

IV. beset Human Nature ; and yet it hath
 ~~~~~ been resisted, and defied, in the utmost  
 Degree of Strength, wherein it is possible for us to imagine it.

*Lot* lived in a *Great* and *Filthy* City ;  
 so *Filthy*, that, as *Great* as it was, *Ten*  
 Good Men could not be found there, to  
 rescue it from Destruction. And yet,  
 amidst all that bad *Company*, He continued  
 untainted, and preserved his Innocence.  
*Noah* lived, not only in a *City*,  
 but in a *World* entirely debauched ; when  
 Gen. vi. *All Flesh had corrupted its Ways*, and  
 13. there were but *Seven* Persons (besides  
 himself) left, Servants of God, and  
 Lovers of Righteousness. And yet, notwithstanding  
 this Universal Depravation of Manners,  
 behold, how untouched he stood, and what a  
 Character he bore !  
 Ver. 9. *Noah was a just Man, and perfect in  
 his Generations, and Noah walked with  
 God !* Will any Man after this, pretend,  
 that it is impossible to withstand the  
 Influence of *Ill Example* ; and to live  
 up to strict Principles of Religion and  
 Virtue,

Virtue, among Thousands, and Ten times S E R M.  
Ten thousands, that neglect and deride IV.  
them. 

The Temptations that arise from *Worldly Interest and Honour*, cannot possibly press harder upon any Man, than they did upon *Moses*. He might have lived in all the Splendor and Luxury of the *Ægyptian* Court, and enjoyed all the Advantages of it, would he but have complied with the Religion and Manners of the Place, and forgotten his Relation to a poor persecuted People: but he resolutely withstood all these Charms, and, *when he was come of Years, refused to* Heb. xi.  
*be called the Son of Pharaoh's Daughter; <sup>24</sup>*  
*choosing rather to suffer Affliction with the People of God, than to enjoy the Pleasures of Sin for a Season: esteeming the Reproach of Christ greater Riches than the Treasures of Ægypt.*

*Ye have heard of the Patience of Job!* James v.  
No Man was ever tempted more sorely, <sup>11.</sup>  
than He, to distrust and deny Divine Providence, and to throw off all Thoughts of Religion. No Man, that we know  
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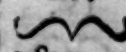


SERM. of, except our Blessed Saviour, at once

IV. suffered so much, and deserved so little: yet hear, how, on his Dunghill, when despoiled of every thing, of his Health, his Possessions, his Servants, his Sons and Daughters, and Friends; hear, I say, how he expresses his entire Reliance on God, and his Absolute Resignation to him! *Till I die* (saith he) *will I not remove my Integrity from me. Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him. Naked came I out of my Mother's Womb, and Naked shall I return thither. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the Name of the Lord!*

Job xxvii.  
5. xiii. 15.  
1. 21.

To these several Scripture Instances, I crave leave to add yet One more, relating to the Passion of *Revenge*; one of the most Importunate and Violent, that are incident to Human Nature; which yet we are sure is conquerable, under all the strongest Temptations to it, that can well be conceived, from the Account of Good *David*. He had *Saul*, his great Enemy, at his Mercy; an Enemy, that had

had often sought his Life, in the basest, S E R M.  
and most unmanly Methods, that had IV.  
*hunted* him (as his own Expression is)  1 Sam.  
*like a Partridge upon the Mountains* : xxvi. 20.

an Enemy that stood between him and a Throne ; so that nothing was wanted, but the taking off *Saul*, in order to *David's* Reigning. This Enemy, I say, he had an Opportunity of removing : The Followers of his Fortune proffered themselves to be the ready Ministers of his Revenge ; and upon *Them* he might have laid the Blame of the Deed, and have been himself (to all Appearance) Innocent and Ignorant of it. This was a Temptation, which some Men would have called insuperable ; and yet *He*, we find, actually withstood it, with so Resolute a Virtue, as the Eloquent Pen of St. *Chrysostom* is never more Eloquent, than when he describes it ; particularly in that Homily, which is designed to shew, that *David's* Conquest of himself, in this Instance, was more great and glorious, than his Victory over *Goliath*. For in vain did that Son of Violence *Abishai*

S E R M. push him on, by saying; *God hath de-*

IV. *livered thine Enemy into thine Hand this*

*Day: now therefore let me smite him, I*  
 1 Sam. xxvi. 8, *pray thee, with the Spear, even to the*  
 &c. *Earth, at once, and I will not smite a Se-*  
*cond Time. His Honourable and Pious*  
*Return to this base Counsel was — As the*  
*Lord liveth, the Lord shall smite him, or*  
*his Day shall come to die, or he shall de-*  
*scend into Battle, and perish: but destroy*  
*Thou him not: for who can stretch forth*  
*his Hand against the Lord's Anointed,*  
*and be Guiltless?*

From Unquestionable Accounts there-  
 fore it appears, that all the forest Tryals  
 of Virtue, which can any ways happen,  
 have been withstood and baffled by Men  
 of like Passions with us, and may there-  
 fore be withstood and baffled still, with  
 Equal Resolution and Innocence.

But because it may be said, that *In-*  
*stances* do not conclude *Universally*: it  
 is certain indeed, that whatever hath  
 once been done, may be done again, by  
 Persons endued with like Degrees of  
 Holy Fortitude and Firmness; but it  
 doth



doth not therefore follow, that I am capable of doing it, whose Infirmary perhaps may be greater than *Other Mens*, in *This Particular* :

IV.  
~~~~~

Because such Pretences may, I say, be made, I shall therefore proceed (farther) to Confirm the Truth laid down, by some General Reasonings, drawn from the *Nature*, either of *Temptation* itself, or of that *Gospel Grace*, which is to support us under it; or of *Man*, the Subject of that *Grace*; or of *God*, the Bestower of it.

They who say, *any* Temptation is not to be conquered, did they consider what they said, would find, that they spake absurdly, and inconsistently. For a *Temptation* is only another Word for an *Experiment*, or *Tryal*; a Tryal, whether we will do, or forbear such a thing; whether we will comply with, or reject such a Proposal: and therefore it supposes it to be in our Power to do, or forbear; to yield, or not to yield; else it were *no* Temptation, *no* Tryal of us. We are not said to Try, *which* way a

SERM. thing will act, that is *necessarily* deter-

IV. mined to act *One* way beforehand. — To
 say therefore, as Sensualists do, that
Some Temptations are *not* resistible, is,
 when that Expression is examined, real-
 ly to say, That *some* Temptations are
not Temptations; for if they *are*, their
 very being *such* implies, that it is possible
 to withstand them.

What is *Grace*, but an Extraordinary
 Supply of Ability and Strength to resist
 Temptations, given us on purpose to
 make up the Deficiency of our Natural
 Strength to do it? And therefore, if
 our Natural Strength, together with
 this Divine Supply, be not now equal
 to every Temptation; the Grace of God
 may *thus* far be said to have been given
 us in *Vain*; in as much as it doth not,
 and cannot reach the *End* for which it is
 bestowed.

Is not *Man*, by Nature, a *Free* Agent?
 Hath he not Liberty and Will? The
 great Difference between him and Brutes,
 doth it not lie in this, That *they* are un-
 avoidably constrained to act *One* way,
 while

while *He* hath always the Power of de- s E R M.
termining himself on *this* Side, or on ^{IV.}
that, of Choosing or Refusing? But 

now, if there be any such things as *Inducements* to Sin, that are altogether *insuperable*, there is an End of his boasted *Freedom*; for in *those* Instances, he acts as necessarily, as mechanically, as *the* Pſal. xlix.
Beasts that perish. The great *End* of ^{12.}
Man is, to Glorify God, by Living according to the *perfect* Rule of right Reason and Virtue; and yet impossible it is, that he should ever attain *this* End, while he converses with Temptations, which he cannot surmount. Now all *Other* Beings (Animate, or Inanimate) have Powers, that enable them to fulfil the *Design* of their Creation: Is *Man* alone utterly destitute of these Powers? Is the Noblest Creature on Earth framed to *No End*? or (which is all one) under an utter Incapacity of reaching *that End*? Is *He* only incapable of arriving at any Degree of Perfection in *his* way, for whose Use and Service all those *other* Creatures were made, which are confes-

S E R M. fedly perfect in *Theirs*? If This be so, he

IV. is so far from being the Pride and Glory
 of the Visible Creation, that he is the
 Meanest, most Imperfect, and Contem-
 ptible of Beings.

Once more. Let us consider the *Nature* and *Perfections of God*. He *is*, and *must* be Holy, Just, and True: and yet He neither *is*, nor *can* be Holy, Just, or True, if He places us under *Irresistible* Temptations.

How can He be *Holy*, who is the Author of Sin? And how can He *but* be the Author of Sin, who (according to the Libertines Scheme) hath so adapted the Frame of our Mind *within*, to the Impression of Evil Objects from *without*, that it is utterly *impossible* for us to withstand the Force of them? Is not this to have a direct Influence and Efficiency in producing Sin, so to order and dispose Second Causes, as that they cannot miss producing it? Now an Holiness that *permits* Sin to be in the World, and *bates* all the while what it permits, we are able to conceive: but an Holiness,

ness, which directly *occasions* Sin, is utterly inconceivable. SERM.
IV.

Nor is the *Justice* of God less blemished by this Pretence, than his *Holiness*. For how can *He* be said to be *Just*, who (as these Men tell us) places us under *Irresistible* Temptations; and yet (as *He* himself assures us) will punish us for *not* resisting them; that is, makes us unavoidably obnoxious to Sin first, and then animadverts upon us for the Commission of it afterwards? Let any Man say worse than this of *Injustice* and *Cruelty*, if he can.

The Last Divine Perfection, concerned in this Dispute, is his *Truth*: — which cannot be maintained, if the Libertines Plea in this Case be true. The Promises of God made to us in Scripture are most Express and Full; That he *will perfect his Strength in our Weakness*; 2 Cor. xii. 9. that *his Grace shall be sufficient for us*; Rom. viii. that he will *make us more than Conquerors in all Temptations*; and, here in the Text, that he *will not suffer us to be tempted, above what we are able*. And
be

SERM. *he is not a Man that he should lye, or as*

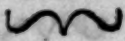
IV. *the Son of Man that he should repent.*

Numb.

xxiii. 19.

And yet as *Man*, and as the *Son of Man* is he made by the Favourers of this Loose Scheme ; which is at the Bottom, built on a secret Distrust, that God will not, in some sharp and pressing Instances, be as good as his Word ; but will leave us to be worsted, where he has promised to assist and strengthen us. Nothing can be plainer, than that he commands us, throughout his Gospel, to reject Temptations ; to Live above *the Lusts of the Flesh, the Lusts of the Eye, and the Pride of Life* ; to be *perfect, even as he is perfect, and pure, even as he is pure.* To this Point all the Various Applications there made to our Hopes and Fears, all his Threatnings and Encouragements tend.

But now, if at the Time that he lays, and thus earnestly presses these Precepts upon us, he knows it is not in our Power to obey them : if he invites, if he woos, and beseeches us to do that, which he hath before-hand so contrived
us,

us, as to make it utterly impossible for S E R M.
us to do, he deals not as sincerely, and IV.
fairly with *Us*, as he hath obliged us, 
under the Penalty of Eternal Wrath,
to deal *One with Another*. *That be far*
from Thee, O Lord; that be far from
Thee to *do*; and *as far* from any of *Us*
to think, or to say! No, *God* is not *in-*
sincere, when he commands, urges,
persuades, us not to comply with sinful
Solicitations; *Man* only is *insincere*, when
he pretends he hath not Strength enough
to master them.

Let us therefore place the Odious Re-
proach, where it ought to lie.—Let us
give Honour to the *Divine* Truth and
Uprightness in laying these Commands
upon us, by confessing *our own* Insince-
rity and Falseness, in endeavouring to
palliate and excuse our Deviations from
them. *Let God be true, and every Man* Rom. iii.
a Lyar. 4.

Thus much for the *Confirmation* of
this Truth. It remains that I should,

Thirdly, Ap-

SERM.

IV.

III. *Thirdly*, Apply it, in a few plain Words of *Exhortation* and *Reproof*, such as the *Argument* naturally suggests, and the *Time* will permit me to make use of.

And *first*, there is Matter of mighty *Comfort* and *Encouragement* arising from hence to the Sincerely Good and Virtuous ; who may now walk on cheerfully in the Paths of Virtue, under these Reflections and Assurances ; satisfied, that no Conflict shall happen to them in the Course of their Spiritual Warfare, in which their great Adversary shall be too hard for them ; and, on that Account, easy, and at rest in their Mind, with regard to the Various Trials and Evils of Life, that *may*, or *may not* befall them. *They shall not be afraid of Evil Tidings, nor dejected at the Thought of approaching Dangers : Their Heart is stablished, and shall not shrink ; it standeth fast, and believeth in the Lord.*

Psal. cxii.
7.

Ver. 8.

Many

Many are frightened from a brave and resolute Practice of their Duty, by considering before-hand, that such and such Inconveniences may possibly attend it, which they know not whether they shall be able to grapple with. But *why* are ye fearful, O ye of little Faith? Is not He that is *with* You, stronger than He that is *against* You? And hath he not promised, that his Strength shall be employed to support Your Weakness? *Hath he said it, and shall he not make it good?* Therefore, *why* are ye troubled, O ye of little Faith? Were we all thoroughly persuaded of this important Truth, that God will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able; were our Minds constantly possessed with a Lively and Vigorous Apprehension of it, there are no Circumstances of Life so sad, no Evils so frightful, no Trials so sharp, but that we might look down upon them with Indifference, and in the midst of what either we expect or endure, of felt or fancied Dangers, take to ourselves Words of Holy Assurance

S E R M.

IV.

Mat. viii.

36.

Numb.

xxiii. 19.

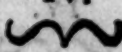
SERM. Assurance with the *Psalmist*, and say,

IV. *I will not be afraid for Ten thousands of*
 ~~~~~  
 Psal. viii. *Temptations, that have set themselves a-*  
 6. *gainst me round about : Yea, though I walk*  
 Psalm *through the Valley of the Shadow of Death,*  
 xxiii. 4. *I will fear no Evil : for thou art with*  
*me ; Thy Rod and Thy Staff comfort me.*

Secondly, Here is ample Matter of Re-  
 proof also to the *Hypocrite*, and the *Pro-*  
*fane Person* : both which, from a Prin-  
 ciple opposite to the great Truth of the  
 Text, would fain justify, or extenuate  
 their sinful Compliances. Let not the  
*Hypocrite* then allow himself in a favou-  
 2 Kings v. *rite Sin with the slight Hope, that in this*  
 18. *thing the Lord will pardon his Servant,*  
 and that one small Fault will be over-  
 looked among a Crowd of other good  
 Qualities. Let him not pretend *Impo-*  
*tence*, in a *particular Case*, and expect  
 to be believed when he says it, because  
 he doth his Duty sincerely, and stands  
 his Ground firmly upon *other Occasions*.  
 This is all but *Pretence* : God, who can-  
 not lye, hath assured us, that *no Tem-*  
*ptation should overtake us, but what we*  
 should

*Temptations not Irresistible.*

III

should be enabled to bear: and when SERM.  
he said *no* Temptation, he made IV.   
Allowance for a *darling* Infirmary.

Let the *Profane* and *Dissolute* Person  
cease to affront God and Man by his  
Impious and Absurd Reasonings! Let it  
be enough, that he resolve, at any rate,  
to be *Impure* and *Lawless*; but let him  
not go on to *defend* his *Impurities*, by re-  
proaching and vilifying Human Nature,  
and under That, the Wise Author and  
Contriver of it! If he is determined to  
live a Life of Sense, and to obey his Lusts,  
yet let him not boldly and openly justify  
it, by saying, that it is *necessary* for  
him to act as he does; and that *All*  
Men are, in *many* Points, though not  
perhaps in the very *same*, just as *He* is;  
as impotent every whit, and utterly dis-  
abled. For this is defending One Sin  
with another, and a much greater than  
the first. It is a malicious Design of re-  
presenting *Every* body to be *Wicked*,  
that *He* may appear *Innocent*. The  
Persons that reason thus, sometimes pre-  
tend to have an high Regard for the Li-  
berties

SERM. berties and Just Freedoms of Human

IV. Nature in *Civil* Matters, and are mighty  
 uneasy, and impatient under any Re-  
 straint of them. If they are such *Friends*  
 to Freedom, in God's Name, let them  
 assert it there, where it will be of most  
 Importance to them, in the Cause of Vir-  
 tue and Religion. Let them remember  
 themselves to be, not only freeborn *En-  
 glishmen*, but freeborn *Christians*: let  
 them be Jealous of their *Spiritual* Liberty,  
 as well as their *Temporal*; and not tie  
 their own Hands, and deliver themselves  
 up (as it were) bound and fettered to the  
 Imperious Sway of their Lusts and Pas-  
 sions. This is to make Man a Slave,  
 and God a Tyrant; and is by no means  
 of a Piece with their Scheme, nor be-  
 coming those who plead for the Rights  
 and Liberties of Human Nature.

Wherefore, laying aside these Shifts  
 and Excuses, let us *All* set ourselves in  
 good earnest to resist all manner of  
 Temptations: let us put out all the  
 Strength which we naturally *have* to this  
 Purpose, and beg of God Supernatural-  
 ly



ly to supply us with what we *have not*. SERM.  
Especially at this Solemn Time, set a- IV.  
part to Commemorate the great Conflict  
of our Saviour with the Tempter in the  
Wilderness, and to prepare and qualify  
Us for such Spiritual Encounters. Let  
us look up to the Example of *Christ*,  
and remember how Victorious he was  
over those fierce Assaults of *Satan*; and  
what Assurance he hath given us, that  
They who tread in his Steps, and reso-  
lutely fight the good Fight, shall be a-  
like Victorious. And whilst we resist,  
as he did, let us be sure to use the same  
Means of Resistance, that he used, *Fasting*  
*and Prayer*: For there is *no Kind* of  
Temptation, but may, by the Joint  
Force of *These*, be *cast out*.

To *These* therefore let us fly, *These*  
let us lay hold of, bending our Knees of-  
ten in private, During this Season of De-  
votion, and applying ourselves to the  
Throne of Grace, in those Excellent  
Words of the Church, which compre-  
hend in short whatever hath in this Dis-  
course been more largely delivered.

SERM. O God, who knowest us to be set in the

IV.  midst of so many and great Dangers, that  
by reason of the Frailty of our Natures we  
cannot stand upright; Grant to us such  
Strength and Protection, as may support  
us in all Dangers, and carry us through  
all Temptations, through Jesus Christ our  
Lord. To whom, &c.

---

THE  
Horrid Imprecation  
OF THE  
*F E W S,*  
AND THE  
Justice and Wisdom  
OF  
G O D  
In fulfilling it upon them.

---



THE

OF THE

J. E. W. S.

AND THE

Justice and Wisdom

OF

G. O. D.

In relation to upon them.

---

*The Horrid Imprecation of the Jews, and  
the Justice and Wisdom of God in ful-  
filling it upon them, displayed:*

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I N A  
S E R M O N

Preached at

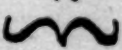
*St. James's Chapel,*

*On Good-Friday, 1715.*

---

M A T T H. xxvii. 25.

*Then answered all the People, and said;  
His Blood be on Us, and on our Children!*

**T**HE History of the *Jewish Nation* S E R M. V.  
is the History of *Divine Provi-*  
*dence*, from whence, if we peruse it   
with Attention, and Diligence, we may  
learn what are the usual Method's of

SERM. God's dealing with a People, of his  
 v. raising or depressing, his rewarding or  
 punishing them, in proportion to their  
 Moral and Religious Deserts or Deme-  
 rits. And there is no Branch of that  
 History, which will furnish us with  
 clearer Instructions of this kind, than the  
 Account of what befell the *Jews* up-  
 on their Crucifying the Lord of Life,  
 and fastening the guilt of that flagitious  
 Act upon Themselves and their Poste-  
 rity; when *all the People answered and*  
*said, His Blood be on Us, and on our*  
*Children!*

The Reflections which I intend to  
 make on these Words, shall be offered to  
 your Thoughts in this Order.

I. I will consider their Connexion  
 with the preceding Circumstances  
 of the Evangelist's Account; by  
 which it will appear, with what  
 Solemnity and Deliberation, and  
 how inveterate a Malice and Obsti-  
 nacy they were uttered.

II. I will



II. I will shew, in how wonderful a Manner this Imprecation was fulfilled on the *Jews*, and is still to this day fulfilling upon them.

V.  


III. I will suggest some Reflections tending to vindicate the Justice and Wisdom of God, in dealing thus severely with this People; his *Justice*, in respect of the Sufferers themselves; his *Wisdom*, with regard to the great Ends and Designs he proposed to himself in their Sufferings. From which I shall, in the

*Last* place, deduce some Useful and Concerning Inferences.

I.

As to the First of these, we may observe, that the Imprecation of the Text was an Act, not of sudden Rage, but of deliberate and unrelenting Malice. They who uttered it, were no Strangers to the Person and Character of *Christ*;

S E R M. had been Eye-witnesses of his spotless  
 v. Life and Conversation; had often heard  
 the Heavenly Doctrine he preached, and  
 seen the matchless Wonders he performed,  
 to confirm the Truth of it; knew the  
 Types and Prophecies, that pointed him  
 out as the *Messiah*, and were, at that  
 very time, in full Expectation of their  
 Accomplishment: And yet resisted all  
 this Light and Conviction; and, because  
 their Interest and Authority with the  
 People declined by his Means, *took Coun-  
 sel to slay him.*

The Chief Priests, the Scribes, and  
 Elders, assembled in *Sanbedrim*, con-  
 demned him over Night; slept upon  
 their unrighteous Judgment, without  
 Remorse; and, when the Morning was  
 come, led him away to *Pilate* the *Ro-  
 man* Governor, to whom the Power of  
 Life and Death appertained. *Pilate*,  
 upon Examination, publickly declared,  
 that he found no Fault in him; and,  
 when they insisted on his Execution,  
 sent them to *Herod* the Tetrarch of *Ga-  
 lilee*, within whose Territory some  
 Part

Part of our Saviour's Life had been S E R M.  
spent; but He also acquitted him. Glad v.  
of Herod's concurring Judgment, Pilate  
addresses himself again to the Jews, ex-  
postulates with them upon their ground-  
less Prosecution of Jesus, and labours to  
divert them from it. When they con-  
tinued still deaf to all his Intreaties,  
he tried yet one Experiment more; gave  
our Saviour up to the Soldiers to be  
*scourged*, hoping, that Sight would mi-  
tigate the Fury, and move the Compas-  
sion of his Accusers; and then proposes  
him as the Man he was by Custom to re-  
lease at the Passover; and, that he might  
be sure to determine their Choice to  
Him, names *Barabbas*, a notorious Rob-  
ber and Murderer, in Competition with  
him. Even this Infamous Person is  
thought a fitter Object of Mercy, than  
Jesus: And now, impatient of Delay,  
and unsoftened by all these Applications,  
they cry out, more vehemently than  
ever, *Crucify him, crucify him. When he*  
*saw therefore that he could prevail nothing*  
(says the Evangelist) *he took Water, and*  
*washed*



S E R M. *washed his Hands before the Multitude,*

v. *saying, I am innocent of the Blood of this  
Just Person ; see Ye to it. Then answered  
All the People, and said, His Blood be  
on us, and on our Children !*

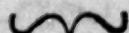
*All the People !* Not only those of mean and base Condition, who are usually the most forward in such Popular Clamours ; but the Chief Priests, the Scribes and Elders themselves, who then stood before the Tribunal of *Pilate* ; not only the Inhabitants of *Jerusalem*, but the whole Nation of the *Jews*, who were then assembled to celebrate the Paschal Solemnity : *All the People*, in the utmost Force and Fulness of that Expression, *answered and said, His Blood be on Us, and on our Children !*

Never sure was any sinful Wish expressed with so much Solemnity, Unanimity, and Warmth ; or attended every way with such high and horrid Circumstances of Aggravation ; and no wonder, therefore, if it received its Accomplishment after so remarkable a manner, as can, in no other Account of Men, or  
Times,

*and the Justice of God, displayed.* 123

Times, be paralleled. Which is what I, S E R M.  
in the

V.



*Second place, proposed to consider and* II.  
*explain.*

*Blood* (i. e. Innocent Blood) *defileth* Numb.  
*the Land* (saith their Law) *and the Land* xxxv. 33.  
*cannot be cleansed of the Blood that is*  
*shed therein, but by the Blood of him that*  
*shed it.* This Rule held even of Com-  
mon Blood, spilt by a private Hand ;  
and how then was the Land to be clean-  
sed of the Blood of the *Messiah*, the Son  
of God, which that whole Nation  
spilt, and made themselves answerable  
for the Guilt of it? how, but by the  
Blood of that whole Nation, by their  
utter Ruin and Excision? which accord-  
ingly happened soon afterwards, when  
the Armies of *Vespasian* encompassed *Je-*  
*rusalem.* The Calamities they under-  
went in that Siege, were such as never  
befell any other City or Nation. The  
Account we have of them is astonishing,  
and would have surpassed all Belief, had  
it

SERM. it not been given us by One, who was  
 v. himself an Eye-witness of them, and a  
 ~ Sharer in them; and who tells us, that  
 no less than eleven hundred Thousand  
*Jews* fell at that time, either by Sword,  
 or Famine.

It may be worth our while to observe  
 from that Historian some Circumstances,  
 which shew, how strict a Correspondence  
 there was between their Crime  
 and their Punishment; an Historian  
 that had nothing less in his View, than  
 to prove, that the One was adapted to the  
 Other, and a just Consequence of it.

X The Nation, collected in a Body to  
 celebrate that Passover, had committed  
 this crying Sin; and the Vengeance of  
 God overtook them at another Paschal  
 Season, when they were again thus embodied,  
 when all the *Jews* were shut up  
 in *Jerusalem*, as Beasts in a Slaughter-  
 house, and none could escape the Sword  
 of the *Romans*.

The Rejection of the true *Messiah* was  
 their Crime, and their hearkening to  
 many false *Messiahs* afterwards was the  
 Source



Source of their Calamities; their frequent Revolts on that Account being the true Cause of the Resolution that was taken to extirpate and destroy them. S E R M. V.

They pursued our Saviour to the Cross, that they might not be suspected of setting up a Rival Title to that of *Cæsar*; lest (said they) *the Romans come, Joh. xi. and take away our Place and Nation.* <sup>48.</sup>

What they endeavoured to avoid by this Wickedness, befell them on the Account of it: The *Romans* came, and took away their Place and Nation so entirely, that, after the second Attempt made upon them by *Titus*, they never had the least Shadow of Magistracy and Government amongst them, and after their final Destruction by *Adrian*, they were not allowed, so much as to live in *Jewry*, no not upon Terms of the lowest, and most abject Slavery.

Nor did the Vengeance of God stop here, but hath pursued and doth still pursue them into all the Corners of the Earth, whither they have been driven; in all which, their Circumstances are so singular,

S E R M. singular, so unlike those of Other Ex-  
 v. iles and Captives, and so different from  
 ~~~~~ what befell them in their former Disper-  
 sions, that no Account can be given of
 their thus Suffering beyond Example,
 but from their Sinning beyond Example
 in the Crucifixion of our Saviour.

To what else can we ascribe that Uni-
 versal Contempt and Abhorrence they
 have undergone from *Christians* of all
 sorts, nay even from *Turks* and *Hea-*
thens; so as to become, in the Prophetick
 Expressions of *Moses*, *an Astonishment,*
 Deut. *a Proverb, and a By-word among all Na-*
 xxviii. 37. *tions, whither the Lord hath led them?*

To what else can be imputed their
 Exclusion from Offices and Honours eve-
 ry where, and even from the Common
 Benefits of Strangers? The frequent
 Oppressions and Exactions, under which
 they have groaned, the various Expulsions,
 and Massacres that have befallen them?
 Wherever they came, *they have* (as the Pen
 of the same Prophet describes their Case)
 Deut. *found no Ease, neither hath the Sole of*
 xxviii. 65. *their Foot had Rest; but the Lord hath*
 given

given them a Trembling Heart, and Failing of Eyes, and Sorrow of Mind. SERM.
V.

In their other Deportations, they had often the Favour of their Conquerors; were permitted by them freely and publicly to exercise their Religion, and even to make Profelytes, to live under their own Laws and Customs, and to retain some Shadow of their Domestick Polity and Government. But in this Last, they have had none of these Privileges, or Encouragements; none secured to them by Law, but indulged only by a Secret, and Precarious Conivance; which has been limited and withdrawn, according to the Will and Pleasure of their Masters.

Finally, whereas the longest of their Captivities, after they settled in *Canaan*, lasted but seventy Years; *This* has endured for above Sixteen hundred; that is, for a greater Tract of Time than intervened, from the first building of their Temple by *Solomon*, to its final Destruction by *Titus*. Thus long have they been no Nation, but so many

S E R M. many scattered Herds of Vagabonds,
v. without any Temple-worship, or Sacrifices (the chief Part of their Religion) and without any reasonable Hope, or Prospect of enjoying them. All the Attempts that have been made towards rebuilding their Holy Place, or even towards recovering their Country out of the Hands of Infidels, have been defeated, and blasted by God in so remarkable a manner, as if he were jealous of every Event, which might seem to open a Way home to this wretched People, and give them the least Glympse of a Deliverance from their Bondage.

And all this while (which is the most strange and singular Circumstance of their Punishment) they have continued unmixed, unincorporated with any of the Nations of the Earth, amidst whom they dwelt; their Preservation in which Separate State is more wonderful, than their Total Dispersion; and could not have happened for so long a time, so uniformly, every where, without the Immediate Interposition of God's Providence,

dence, to prevent a Coalition ; in order to render them, by that means, Standing and Illustrious Monuments of his Vengeance, to all Nations and Ages. The Justice and Wisdom of which Severe Proceeding, I shall now in the

S E R M.
V.
~~~~~

*Third* place, briefly open to you : The *Justice* of God, in respect to the *Sufferers* themselves ; and his *Wisdom*, with regard to the great *Ends* and *Designs* he proposed to himself in their Sufferings.

The *Justice* of God is manifest, in thus punishing *that* Race of Men, which *actually* spilt the Blood of *Christ*, and made themselves, by a dire Imprecation, responsible for it. And as to the Consequences of this Punishment on *their Children and Descendants*, it must be considered, that they reach only to those of their Posterity, who abet their Forefathers Crime, and continue in their Infidelity ; for to those of them, who abhor it, who acknowledge *Christ* to be the *Messiah*, entertain his Doctrine, and

S E R M. throw themselves into the Arms of his

v. Mercy, an Exclusion from the *Earthly*

*Canaan*, and its Privileges, can be thought no grievous Punishment, when

Heb. xi.  
16.

that Loss is so amply recompensed by their gaining Admission to a *better, an Heavenly Country*, even a Citizenship of

Ver. 10. that *new Jerusalem, which is from above, and whose Builder is God.*

And if the *Justice* of God be free from all Imputation in this great Event, his *Wisdom*, I am sure, is highly illustrated by it. For the Destruction of the *Jewish* Polity and Nation was so ordered by him, in all the Steps and Methods of its Accomplishment, as to confirm the Truth, and spread the Interests of Christianity.

Could there be a plainer, and more irrefragable Proof of the Divine Mission of our Lord, than the fulfilling of this Curse on his Murtherers? Who, that saw their wide Dispersions, and sad Sufferings, could forbear arguing after this manner? No Nation, from the Beginning of the World, was ever punished



as this Nation; and therefore, if the S E R M.  
Punishment of Nations be for their Sins, V.  
some Heinous Act must have been done  
by them, which never was done by any  
other Nation: And what could that be,  
but the Effusion of the Blood of *Jesus*?  
That Blood therefore, the Guilt of which  
pursues them, was the Blood of an In-  
nocent Person, and not of an Impostor,  
the Seal of the Doctrine which he pu-  
blished, and the Evidence of his being  
what he affirmed himself to be, the *Son*  
*of God*.

Indeed this way of Reasoning was so  
Obvious and Cogent, that many, even  
among the *Jews* themselves, acknow-  
ledged the Force of it. And as for those  
who obstinately persisted in the Sin of  
their Forefathers, after *Jerusalem* was  
destroyed, even they themselves unwill-  
ingly contributed to the Advancement  
of Christianity.

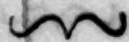
The Dispersed *Jews* carried along  
with them into all Quarters of the Earth,  
the Oracles of God, those Ancient Pro-  
phesies of their Nation, which described

S E R M. the Person and Character of the *Messiah*,  
 V. foretold the Time of his Appearance, and the Circumstances of his Death and Sufferings. And these Prophecies, when duly attended to, were sufficient for the Conviction of any Men, who did not lie, as those *Jews* did, under a Judicial Infatuation and Blindness. They were the great Enemies of the Gospel, and yet the chief Promoters of it, by the Attestation which they gave to the Integrity of those Books, from whence the Proof of its Divine Original was most clearly derived. A Testimony of unsuspected Credit! since the *Jews* would not, if they could, have corrupted those Books, in favour of *Christians*; and could not have corrupted them, if they would, by reason of their manifold and wide Dispersions. During which, God, I have said, has kept them in a Separate State, not suffering them to incorporate with any other Nation, in order by this means to render the Triumphs of his Justice more conspicuous, and in order also to preserve them ready for that gracious

cious Call, which, we piously believe, shall one Day summon them from all Parts of the Earth, *and gather together the Outcasts of Israel.* — That so *We* and *They* may become *One Fold, under One Shepherd*, Christ the Righteous! O the *Depth of the Riches both of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God!* How *unsearchable* are his Judgments, and his Ways past finding out! However,

S E R M.

V.



Rom. xi.

33.

*These* we may humbly presume to have been *some* of those *Many Wise Ends*, to which Divine Providence directed this Wonderful Dispensation. *Others* might be added: But I forbear;—and shall choose rather to spend the remaining Part of my Time, in deducing (as I proposed) from the Whole some Useful and Concerning *Inferences*.

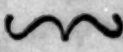
1. *His Blood be on Us, and on our Children!* and it happened to them, even according to their Wishes. Let us learn from hence, to abstain from all such rash and horrid Imprecations, which the Ears of sober Heathens would tingle at; but which are more unbecoming,



S E R M. and more heinous (as, I fear, they are  
 v. more familiar) in the Mouths of *Chri-  
 stians*. For the Vengeance of God will  
 find us out, not only for the Evil Deeds  
 we commit, but for the profane Folly  
 (so frequent among us) of wishing that  
 Damnation to ourselves, which we o-  
 therways but too well deserve. They,  
 who thus add to the Guilt of their Sins  
 the binding Power of a Curse, are dou-  
 bly unpardonable; they consent to their  
 Punishment, as they before consented  
 to their Crime; and *their Damnation*  
 therefore is every way just.

Matt. xii. *Every Idle Word, that we speak, we*  
 36. *shall give an Account thereof at the Day*  
*of Judgment*, says our Saviour. How  
 much more shall we be accountable for  
 those (not idle, empty Forms of Speech,  
 but) solemn and significant Imprecations,  
 by which we anticipate our Judgment,  
 and give Sentence against ourselves.  
 Let such an Iniquity be far from all those  
 that name the Name of *Christ*! To  
 whom Simplicity of Speech is as strictly  
 enjoined,

enjoined, as even Sincerity of Heart, S E R M.  
or Integrity of Manners.

2. The Completion of this Curse,   
and the Vengeance taken on that whole  
Nation, in consequence of it, will lead  
us to admire the inscrutable Methods of  
God's Providence, in bringing about the  
Salvation of Sinners. By the Scandal  
of the Cross, and the several mean Cir-  
cumstances of our Saviour's Humilia-  
tion, the Wise, the Noble, and the  
Mighty Men of the Earth, were kept  
back from embracing the Faith of *Christ*.  
But that Prejudice against Christianity  
soon turned to its Advantage; when  
they saw his Murderers punished in so  
remarkable, and astonishing a manner;  
then they began to discern the surpas-  
sing *Dignity* of the Person suffering, and  
the Infinite *Merit* of his Sufferings; to  
discover some of the *Reasons*, to admire  
the *Wisdom*, and lay hold of the *Bene-  
fits* of that humble and mysterious Dis-  
pensation, *God manifest in the Flesh*, dy-  
ing on the Cross, *to destroy the Works of  
the Devil*,

S E R M. A Subject always highly deserving,

v. but on this Day more particularly challenging our devout Reflections; which it will to the utmost both exercise and improve. A Subject full of Wonders, not to be exhausted! Inasmuch as it contains the *Breadth, and Length, and Depth, and Height* (even the whole Extent and Compass) of the *Love of God towards Mankind in Christ Jesus*.

Eph. iii.  
18.

*It is good for us to be here, to dwell on the Contemplation of this delightful, this amazing Mystery; which even Angels desire to look into, but cannot fully comprehend.*

Let us determine, with St. Paul, to count every thing but *Dross and Dung*, in comparison of the *Excellency of this Knowledge of Christ crucified; to the Jews, indeed, a Stumbling Block, and to the Greeks Foolishness; but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the Power of God, and Christ the Wisdom of God.*

Phil. iii.  
8.

1 Cor. i.  
23.

3. It may be a third Improvement of what has been discoursed, if we take  
Occasion



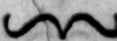
Occasion from thence, to account for the S E R M.  
Infidelity of those Men, who live where v.  
the Gospel of *Christ* is professed, and  
yet shut their Eyes against the Light of  
it. Can we wonder, this should happen  
now and then to *particular* Persons,  
when it is the Case of so great a *Body* of  
Men, as the *Jews*; such a Nation of  
hardened Infidels, who though they  
have smarted under the Rod of God,  
during Sixteen Ages, for spilling the  
Blood, and rejecting the Doctrine of  
*Christ*, continue still insensible, both of  
the Guilt of the One, and the Evidence  
of the Other? When such an Effect  
happens, we must not impute it to any  
Sett of Natural, or Moral Causes; the  
Hand of God is in it, and some Degree  
of a Judicial Induration. Could we  
look to the Bottom of such Mens Un-  
belief, we should find, that it is gene-  
rally owing to some high and flagrant  
Act of Wickedness, which provoked  
God to withdraw his Grace from them,  
after they had long resisted the Power of  
it, and leave them to walk in the Ways  
of

SERM. of their own Heart, and in the Sight of

v. their own Eyes, without Check or  
 ~~~~~ Controul. And in such a Case, though  
 they may be Men of great Acuteness
 and Sagacity, in discerning and pursuing
 the Advantages of this Life, as the
Jews themselves are; yet, in respect of
 Divine Truth, they may be altogether
 2 Cor. iv. inapprehensive and stupid. *If the Go-*
 4. *spel be hid, it is hid to them which are lost,*
in whom the God of this World hath blind-
ed the Minds of them which believe not,
lest the Light of the Glorious Gospel of
Christ, who is the Image of God, should
shine unto them.

4. The Reflections which have been
 advanced, do also (in the fourth Place)
 suggest to us Matter of holy Caution
 and Fear. If the most beloved Nation
 on Earth, and chosen People of God;
 They, to whom pertained the Adoption,
 Rom. ix. and the Law, and the Covenants of God,
 4. and the Promises; if They could sin a-
 way all these Privileges, and utterly for-
 feit the Divine Protection and Favour,
 What Security have We, that, abusing
 and

and the Justice of God, displayed. 139

and despising the same Mercies, we shall S E R M.
not smart under the same Judgments? V.
that *the Kingdom of God*, of which we 
are unworthy, *shall not be taken away* Mat. xxi.
from us, and given to a Nation bringing 43.
forth the Fruits thereof? The Inference
is *St. Paul's*;— *Well!* (says he) *because* Rom. xi.
of Unbelief, they were broken off; and 20, 21.
Thou standest by Faith: Be not high-mind-
ed, but fear. For if God spared not the
Natural Branches, take heed lest he also
spare not Thee.

In order therefore, to avoid their Fate,
let us avoid any Resemblance of their
Guilt, and keep ourselves at as great a
Distance as we can from that Sin of the
Jews, which drew these Calamities up-
on them, and in which even We, who
live so long after it was committed,
may yet be to some Degree involved;
if we are professed Enemies of Goodness,
if we slander *Christ's* Word, blaspheme
his Person, and despise his Messengers;
if we privately bring in dangerous He-
resies, destructive of Christian Faith and
Christian Practice; for of such Persons
St. Peter

S E R M. St. *Peter* and St. *Paul* have pronounced,
 V. that *they deny the Lord who bought them,*
 2 Pet. ii. *crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh,*
 1. *and put him to an open Shame.*
 Heb. vi. 6.

In order to stand clear of this Imputation, let it not be thought enough by us, that we *do not* run into any of these Excesses ourselves, while we abet, or connive at those *who do*: But let us set ourselves, in our several Places and Stations, to discountenance Infidelity, and to rebuke that Spirit of Profaneness, which hath for many Years past appeared open and barefaced with Impunity (I had almost said, with Applause) amongst us, to the great Offence of sober Minds, to the Prejudice of all good Order and Government, the Disgrace of our Religion, and the Peril of Souls! It is high Time that these daring Attempts against the Honour of *Christ* and his Gospel should be effectually checked and suppressed, that the Civil Magistrate's Authority should be employed, and the Spiritual Sword of Excommunication unsheathed against such Impious Offenders.

He

and the Justice of God, displayed.

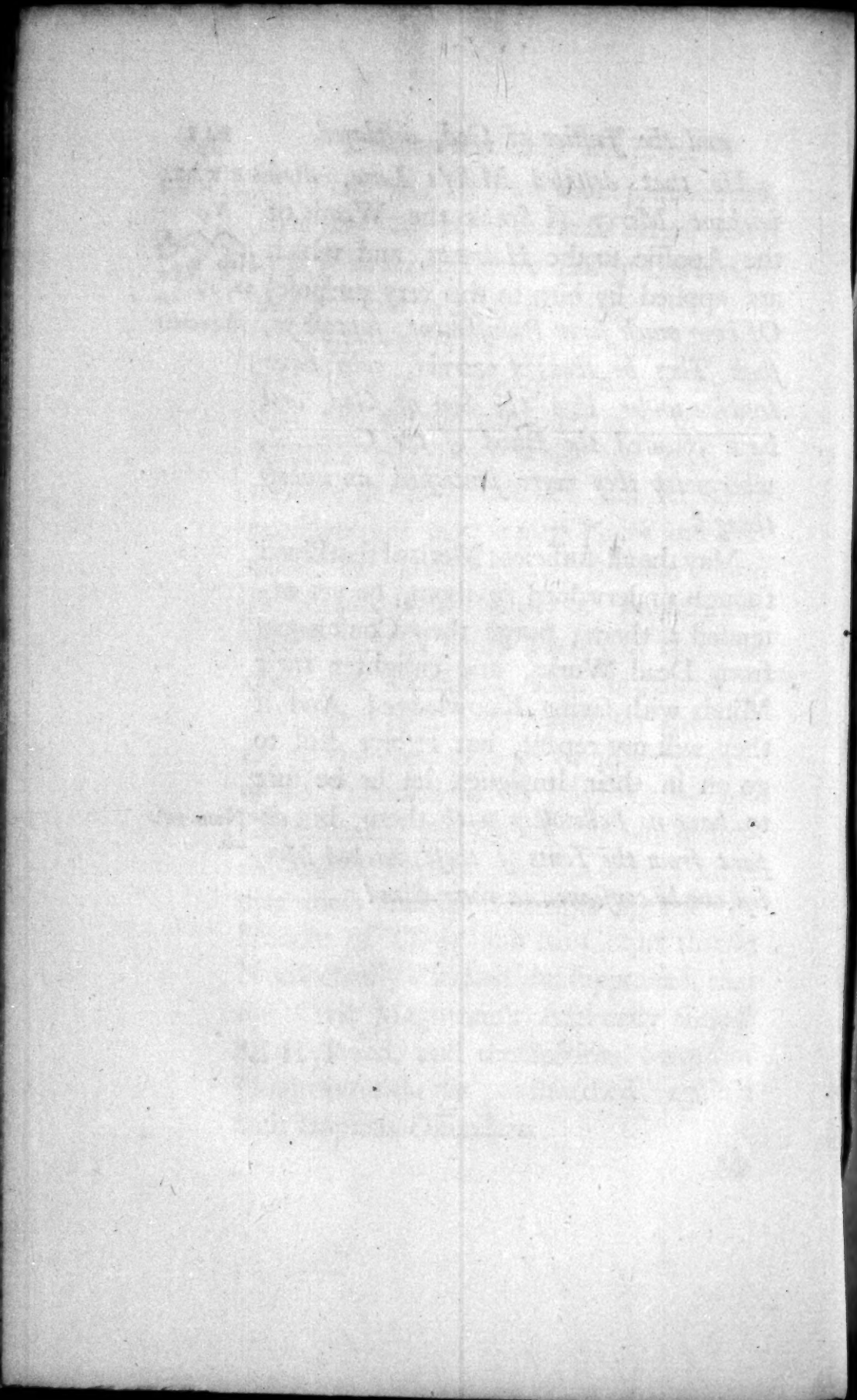
141

He that despised Moses's Law, died SERM.
without Mercy (I speak the Words of v.
the Apostle to the Hebrews, and which Heb. x.
are applied by him to this very purpose) 28, 29.

*Of how much sorer Punishment, suppose ye,
shall They be thought worthy, who have
trodden under Foot the Son of God, and
have counted the Blood of the Covenant,
wherewith they were sanctified, an unholy
thing?*

May the all-sufficient Merit of that Blood
though undervalued by them, be yet ex-
tended to them; purge their Consciences
from Dead Works, and enlighten their
Minds with saving Knowledge! And if
they will not repent, but resolve still to
go on in their Impieties, let us be sure
to have no Fellowship with them, but de- Num. xvi.
part from the Tents of these wicked Men, 26.
lest we be consumed in their Sins!

THE



THE
CHRISTIAN State,
A State of
SUFFERING.

SUFFERING

A PART OF

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE

THE

The Christian State, a State of Suffering.

A
S E R M O N

Preached at

Westminster-Abbey,

Nov. 1, 1717.

Being *All-Saints Day.*

1 P E T. ii. 21.

*Even hereunto were ye called; because
Christ also suffered for us, leaving us
an Example, that ye should follow his
Steps.*

THE Duty, and the Perfection of S E R M.
a Christian consists in the Imita- VI.
tion of *Christ*; in the Imitation of every
Part of the Spotless Example, of the
VOL. III. L Passive

S E R M. Passive as well as Active Graces, in

VI. which he abounded. Both Sides of his
 Character are highly useful and instructive to us; Both, at different Times, and for different Ends, alike necessary to be attentively considered, and closely followed by us. But *some* Occasions, *some* Times there are, when that Part of *Christ's* Example, which relates to the sad Sufferings he underwent, and the Heroick Manner in which he bore them, is principally to be regarded by *Christians*. *Such* was the Season, at which St. *Peter* wrote this Epistle to his Brethren of the Dispersion, then every where oppressed, afflicted, persecuted: And *such* is this particular Day in the *Calendar* of our Church; sacred to the Memory of those Saints, Confessors, and Martyrs of old, who being exercised in Afflictions, and trained up to Sufferings, *fought the good Fight, and finished their Course*, and obtained the Crown, which was laid up for them by the Author and Finisher of their Faith, the great Pattern and Rewarder of their Sufferings, *Christ Jesus!*

2 Tim. iv.
7.

Even

Even hereunto they were called, and in SERM.
 this their Saintship chiefly consisted; the VI.
Imitation of Him who suffered for Us, ~~~~~
leaving Us an Example, that We should
follow his Steps.

The chief Design of St. Peter, throughout this Epistle, is, to fortify the new Converts against those Disgraces and Afflictions, which had befallen, or were ready to befall them, on the Account of their Religion; and the Argument, by which he persuades them here in the Text to Equanimity and Patience, is, we see, that *even hereunto they were called*; that they felt no more now, than what, from their very Entrance on Christianity, they had Reason to expect; that these were the Terms, on which they embraced the Faith; that such Sufferings are the proper Lot and Portion of *Christians*; because (as he adds) *Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an Example that ye should follow his Steps.* If the Cap- Heb. ii.
tain of our Salvation was made perfect 10.
through Sufferings, how should any Man
who marches under his Ensigns, ever

S E R M. hope to exempt himself from them? He

VI.  not only gave us Precepts, which we are to obey, but a Pattern also to direct, and facilitate our Obedience. They

1 John ii. therefore, *who say, they abide in him,*
6. *ought themselves also to walk, even as he walked;* and consequently (if the Will of God so be) to Suffer, as He Suffered, with a becoming Meekness and Patience, with Fortitude and Firmness: Especially if it be considered, that He *Suffered for Us*, i. e. on our Account, and for our Advantage: And why then should we think it hard and unreasonable to Suffer for ourselves? or be forward and uneasy under any Affliction of Life that befalls us? He took out the Sting, and Expiated the Guilt of our Sins by his Sufferings; but so as to leave us still under an Arrear of Punishment, which We ourselves are to discharge, and, by that means (as St. Paul emphatically speaks)

Col. i. 24. *to fill up what is behind of the Afflictions of Christ in our Flesh. Even hereunto were We called; because Christ also suffered*
ed

ed for us, leaving us an Example, that SERM.
We should follow his Steps. VI.

The Words, you see, will give me a proper Occasion of explaining two great Truths, always fit to be inculcated to *Christians*, and always present to the Minds, and exemplified in the Actions of those Holy Men and Women, whom we this Day profess to Commemorate.

The two Points are these :

First, That the *Christian* State, how- I.
ever willing some *Christians* may be to mistake the Nature of it, is certainly a *State of Suffering*.

Secondly, That the Sufferings of *Christ* II.
afford us a plain *Argument*, why *We* also should expect our Share of Sufferings; and withal a powerful *Motive* to support us under them. And

First, I am to shew, that the *Christian* I.
State is a State of Suffering.

SERM. *This is an hard Saying, which will not*

VI. easily gain Admittance with the Great,
 Luke xvi. the Rich, and the Prosperous; with
 19. those who *are clothed in Purple and fine Linen, and fare Sumptuously every Day.*

And yet, as unwelcome as the Doctrine may be, it is very clear and certain. We can scarce open a Page of the Gospel, without finding it either laid down in the Express Words of *Christ* and his Apostles, or recommended by their Practice. *Even hereunto are we called,*

1 Thes. iii. 3. says St. Peter in the Text; *We are thereunto appointed,* *Ἔς τὸ καίμεθα,* says St. Paul, where he is professedly treating of this Subject. And in another Place, *All that will live Godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer Persecution.* And again, *We must through much Tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God.*

'Tis true, these, and many other Passages of like Import in the *New Testament*, are chiefly, and in their utmost Extent, to be understood of the Times when they were first uttered, the Infant Age of Christianity; when the Standard
 of

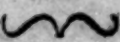
of the Cross being set up, all they, who re-
 paired to it, were engaged in a continual
 Opposition to the Powers of this World;
 and Persecutions, Afflictions, Distresses
 attended them in every Step of their Con-
 flict; when the Sufferings of *Christians*
 were designed to promote the Reception
 of the Faith of *Christ*, and the Seed of
 the Word sown was to be watered, and
 made fruitful by the Blood of Martyrs.
 Then indeed was it most remarkably,
 most eminently true, that the *Christian*
State and Profession was a State of Suf-
 fering. However, though this be not at
 present the General Lot of *Christians*,
 although the Instances be now rare, in
 which we are thus called upon to wit-
 ness a good Confession, and to resist even
 to Blood; yet still, I say, there is a Sense
 of the Assertion in which it holds good,
 and will hold good to the End of the
 World; still the Doctrine of the Gospel
 is Λόγος σωτηρίας, the Doctrine of the Cross,
 and He, who would be a true Disciple of
Christ, must even now deny himself,
 and take up his Cross, and follow him.

SERM. Can we doubt of this Truth, if we

VI.  consider the Solemn Engagements, into which we entered, when we were first listed in his Service at our Baptism, That we would *manifestly fight under his Banner, against Sin, the World and the Devil, and continue Christ's faithful Soldiers and Servants to our Lives End?* Are these Enemies so weak, and contemptible, as that we should hope to resist them with Ease? Can this Combat be maintained, this Warfare be accomplished by us, without great Difficulties and Troubles?

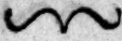
The good *Christian* is not of this World, even while he lives *in it*; and therefore the Man of this World, whose Life is not like his, whose Ways are of another Fashion, will be sure to malign, and traduce, and perhaps despise him.

1 Pet. iv. 4. Because *he runs not with them to the same Excess of Riot*, they will charge him with Affectation and Singularity at least, if not with downright Hypocrisy; they will *daily mistake his Sayings*, misconstrue all his best Actions, misrepresent his
brightest

brightest Virtues : His Humility and S E R M.
 Lowliness of Mind, shall be called V I.
 Meanness of Spirit ; his Patience under 
 Injuries and Affronts, Insensibility and
 Folly ; his Exactness in the Performance
 of Religious Duties, his Conscientious
 Abstinence from whatever has the Ap-
 pearance of Evil, his holy Severities
 and Mortifications shall furnish ample
 Matter for their ungodly Disdain : *The* Psal. cxix.
Proud will have him exceedingly in De- 51.
rision ; he will be as a Tabret unto them ; Job. xvii.
a By-word of the People, and the Song of 6.
the Drunkards. Psal. lxix.
12.

And can a Man so treated and vilified,
 be said to be in an unsuffering State ? I
 am sure, these are reckoned among the
 bitter Ingredients of our Saviour's Suf-
 ferings ; so that even where he is said to
 have *endured the Cross, and despised the*
Shame, it is added also, in the next
 Verse, that he *endured the Contradiction*
of Sinners—As if that Circumstance add-
 ed some Degree of Weight and Sharp-
 ness to his Other Afflictions.

The

SERM. The Sincere Christian cannot deny or
 VI.  dissemble the Truth, when a proper
 Occasion bids him stand forth and own
 it; he cannot flatter *Wickedness in high
 Places*, fall in with false and prevailing
 Opinions, or *follow a Multitude to do
 Evil*; and He, who cannot bend himself
 to a Compliance in such Cases, must
 expect, not to continue unmolested, but
 to reap the proper Fruits of his Stub-
 bornness. Or should the Course of this
 World, in which he lives, run smoothly
 on; should he be ruffled and discompos-
 ed by no Enemies, no Accidents from
 without, yet still there are Inward An-
 xieties and Sorrows, Perplexities and
 Troubles, that attend him.

He finds (for St. Paul himself owns that
 Rom. vii. he found) *a Law in his Members war-*
 23. *ring against the Law of his Mind, and*
bringing him, or endeavouring to bring
him, into Captivity to the Law of Sin.
 He has unruly Appetites to mortify,
 strong Passions to tame; and the Strug-
 gle with these, even after they seem
 vanquished, must sometimes be renew-
 ed,

ed, and such a Struggle is no ways SERM.
Joyous, but Grievous. The Fear he has VI.
of offending, keeps him under a perpet-
tual Alarm; the Sense he has of Guilt
is quick and pungent, and subjects him,
whenever he falls, to great Remorse and
Uneasiness. What Sighs, what Groans,
what Floods of Tears does it occasion?
What Rigour, what Revenges on him-
self does it produce? How doth *his own* Jer. ii. 19
Wickedness (nay, how doth his very Er-
rors and Infirmities) *correct him, and his*
Backslidings reprove him?

Or *could* we suppose him to have no
Occasion thus to suffer for his *Own* Sins,
yet will he never want *one* of suffering
for the Sins of *Others*. The good *Chri-*
stian cannot be an unconcerned Specta-
tor of any great Degree of Wicked-
ness, even while he himself stands free
from the Infection of it. His tender
Regard for God's Honour, for the Inter-
ests of Piety, and the Good of Souls,
makes him lay to heart the crying Ini-
quities of that People, amidst whom he
dwells, and grieve for those, who do
not

SERM. not (and the rather, because they do

VI. not) grieve for themselves. When he
 observes the Scandalous Progress of Infidelity, the open Growth of Profaneness; the Emulation and Strife, the Oppression and Injustice, the Hatred and Cruelty, that abound in the World through Lust; in a word, when he sees the most immoral Practices and Pollutions of the Heathens reigning among those *who name the Name of Christ*, though in their *Works they deny him*; such a Scene of Sin and Misery wounds him to the Quick, and fills his Soul with unspeakable Sorrow. *Rivers of Waters run down his Eyes, because Men keep not God's Law.*

Psa. cxix.
136.

'Tis true, his Mind is not always employed in this melancholy manner; he has also the Inward Joys and Consolations, arising from the Testimony of a good Conscience, from the Assurances of God's Favour, and the Refreshing Influences of his good Spirit; but even *These*, either for the Punishment of his Misuse of them, or for a Tryal of his Faith,

Faith, are sometimes withdrawn; and S E R M.
 then his Soul is sorrowful even unto VI.
Death; Fearfulness and Trembling come Matth.
upon him, and his Heart within him is e- xxvi. 38.
ven like melted Wax. And this State of Pfal. lv.
 Dereliction is what the most Experienc- Pfal. xxii.
 ed Saints and Servants of God have 14.
 felt, and complained of: And no won-
 der; since something not unlike it hap-
 pened even to the Son of God himself.

Add to this, that even the best of Men,
 and those who are advanced nearest to-
 ward Perfection, have often some pecu-
 liar Infirmary of Body or Mind, which
 sticks close to them, gives them great
 Interruptions in the Course of their Du-
 ty, and great Trouble and Uneasiness
 in the Performance of it; and this is
 permitted by God, in order to keep
 them Vigilant, Humble, Dependent;
 even to St. Paul there was given a Thorn 2 Cor.
in the Flesh, a Messenger of Satan to buf- xii. 7.
fet him.

The *Christian State* then (even setting
 aside the Extraordinary Case of Persecu-
 tion for the Name of *Christ*) is certain-
 ly

SERM. ly a *State of Suffering*; *Hereunto are we*

VI. *called*, as many of us as have vowed Obedience to *Christ*, and profess to believe, and to live, as he hath taught us. And if so, let us all lay our Hands upon our Hearts, and examine ourselves, whether, and how far we may be said to be in such a State, to have fulfilled the Duties, and undergone the Hardships, which entitle us to the Privileges of it.

Have we then lived according to the Flesh, or according to the Spirit? Have we exercised ourselves in the severe and rugged Parts of our Duty? or have we chosen for our Lot, the Gratifications of Sense, and vain Pleasures which did not profit us? Have we called ourselves often to account for our Miscarriages, and made a serious, a strict, and impartial Scrutiny into our past Lives and Actions? Have we felt the Spirit of Compunction and Contrition moving in our Hearts, and condemning us for our Transgressions? Have we deplored them? Have we prayed, and striven against

gainst them, and applied those harsh, SERM.
but wholesome Remedies, which the VI.
Christian Religion prescribes for the 
Cure of such Diseases; Fasting, and
Self-denial, and Mortification? Have
we experienced the afflicting Hand of
God, laying hold of us, when we
transgressed, and gently leading us back
into the Paths of Virtue, from whence
we had swerved, by seasonable and mer-
ciful Chastisements? If this be our Case,
we have some Reason to hope, that we
are in such a State and Condition of
Mind, as becomes a good *Christian*,
such as God will accept, and improve,
and reward.

But now, on the other side, what if
the Vanities of Life, and the Enjoy-
ments of Sense have engrossed all our
Thoughts and Affections? What, if we
have been so far from *crucifying* our
Lusts, that we have *indulged* them to the
utmost? from *mourning* for our Sins,
that we have even *boasted* of them?
from humbling ourselves in private, by
voluntary Austerities, that we have not
regarded,

SERM. regarded, as we ought to do, even the

VI. *stated* Times of Publick and Solemn
 ~~~~~ Humiliations? What if our *Diversions*  
 have been pursued in prejudice to our  
*Devotions*? have taken up the *Room*,  
 and eaten out the *Life* of them? Can  
 such Inclinations, such Practices be re-  
 conciled to the Spirit of the Gospel? Is  
 this the Work, the Employment, *where-*  
*unto we are called*? Is this Temper of  
 Mind agreeable to the Character of a  
 Serious and Sincere *Christian*?

Believe it, a Life of uninterrupted Jol-  
 lity and Mirth, of perpetual Pleasure  
 and Amusement, is not, cannot be the  
 Life of a true Disciple of *Christ*. These  
 things we may taste, but we are not to  
 rest in them; they are our Refreshments  
 on the way, not the End and Design of  
 our Journey. He that pretends to be  
 a *Christian indeed* (as St. Paul speaks of  
 a *Widow indeed*) and liveth in Pleasure,  
 is dead while he liveth; he savoureth not  
 the things that be of God, hath no Relish  
 of the Chief Duties and Offices of the  
 Christian Life; and though he may put

1 Tim. v.

6.

Matt. xvi.

23.

on



on some of the Outward *Forms* and Ap-  
pearances of Godliness, is a Stranger to  
the Inward Life and *Power* of it. *That*  
is only to be attained by his fixing his  
Eye on the Example, and following the  
Steps of a Suffering, Crucified Saviour.  
And therefore, I shall, as I proposed in  
the *next* place,

S E R M.  
VI.  
~

*Secondly*, Consider how the Sufferings  
of *Christ* afford us a *plain Argument*,  
why *We* also should expect *Our Share*  
of Sufferings, and withal, a *powerful*  
*Motive* to support us under them. And  
it is well they afford us *both* these; for  
the *one*, without the *other*, would be an  
Uncomfortable Consideration. II.

The Apostle, we see, proposes the  
Example of *Christ* on the *Suffering Side*  
of it; as if *that* were the *Chief View*  
we were to take of it, *that* the great  
End and Design of his being made an  
Example to us. The most difficult Part  
of our Duty is to suffer well; and there-

S E R M. fore we stood *most* in need of a Perfect

VI. Pattern in *this* respect, to direct and encourage us; and what we wanted *most*, *Christ*, who came to make good all our Defects, and to heal all our Infirmities, took *most* Care to supply us with: and therefore from his Birth throughout his Life, to his Death, this is the Character, under which he appears to us. His Sufferings indeed were finished on the Cross; but they began, when he first entered on his State of Humiliation; when emptying himself of all his Glory, *he took upon him to deliver Man*, and, in order to it, *did not abhor the Virgin's Womb*.

Under this View if we consider him, and withal consider, that 'tis our Duty, and our Happiness to resemble him; what Hopes can we have to escape the Sufferings of this Life? Nay what Reason totally to decline them? How can we possibly, *without Suffering*, be like Him, who himself *did nothing but suffer*?

The Infinite Dignity of his Person (for he was the Son of God, and God the Son) hindered him not from taking  
ing

ing our Nature upon him, with all its SERM.  
meanest Circumstances, and with all its VI.  
most afflicting Accidents: and who is   
there then among the Sons of Men, so  
distinguished from the rest by his Great-  
ness, or Preeminence, as that it should  
misbecome him to learn this great Les-  
son of Humility? who, that should be  
ashamed to practise it?

He was of unblemished Purity, of  
perfect Sanctity and Innocence; and  
therefore the Calamities he underwent,  
were no ways necessary, either for the  
Tryal or Improvement of his Virtue; and  
yet he chose to undergo them. How then  
should the very Best of us (who ought,  
God knows, to be much Better, and yet,  
without such Tryals, are in danger of  
growing much Worse, than we are) ex-  
pect or even desire to be free from them?

Certainly we judge not aright of our  
Spiritual Wants and Necessities, of our  
Carnal Infirmities and Failures, if we  
wish to live always in perfect Ease, and  
think it a Mark of God's Favour, when  
nothing happens to deject, or disturb us.



SERM. Nay, but *then* is the Time, when we

VI. have *most* Reason to suspect our selves.

~~~~~ There is a *Wo*, we know, denounced on  
 Luke vi. *Christians, when all Men shall speak well*
 26. *of them*; for so did they not of *Christ*

Rom. viii. *himself*; and we are predestinate to be con-
 29. *formed to his Image*; and therefore, as

Heb. xii. *far as we deviate from that Original, so*
 7. *far we fall short of Perfection and Happi-*

Mat. iii. *ness. If we endure Chastning, God deal-*
 17. *eth with us as Sons*; even as he dealt with
 him, of whom he said: *This is my beloved*
Son, in whom I am pleased.

1 Pet. iv: *Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered*
 1. *for us in the Flesh, let us arm ourselves*
with the same Mind; with a Resolution
 to imitate him in his perfect Submission
 and Resignation of himself to the Divine
 Will and Pleasure; in his Contempt
 of all the Enjoyments of Sense, of all
 the Vanities of this World, its Allure-
 ments and Terrors; in his Practice of
 Religious Severities; in his Love of Re-
 ligious Retirement; in his making it his
Meat and his *Drink*, his only Study and

Joh. ix. 4. *Delight, to work the Work of him that*
sent

sent him; in his choosing, for that End SERM.

(*when* that End could not otherwise be VI.

attained) Want before Abundance, Shame 

before Honour, Pain before Pleasure,

Death before Life; and in his prefer-

ring *always* a laborious uninterrupted

Practice of Virtue, to a Life of Rest,

and Ease, and Indolence. *Let the same*

Mind, in all these respects, *be in us*,

which was in Christ Jesus, who suffered

for us, leaving us an Example, that we

should follow his Steps. The Task in-

deed is hard to Flesh and Blood, the

Difficulties that lie in our Way, are ex-

ceeding great, and would be altogether

insuperable, had not He, who set us an

Example, so far above the Level and

Pitch of human Nature, enabled, as well

as commanded us to follow it.

But, Thanks be to God, *That* is not

our Case. *Christ*, by the Merit of those *ve-*

ry Sufferings, which he proposes to our

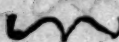
Imitation, has purchased for us all such

Extraordinary Aids and Assistances, as

are requisite to support us under them.

By what he underwent for our Sakes

S E R M. in his Life, and at his Death, he obtain-

VI. ed of God, not only a Release from the
 Punishment of our Sins, but new Powers to qualify us for a further Increase in Virtue; not only the Pardoning, but Sanctifying Grace of his Spirit; by the

Gal. v. 24. Means of which we can now *crucify the Flesh, with the Affections and Lusts*; mortify and subdue all our irregular Passions, undervalue Pleasures, rejoyce in Afflictions, and *walk even as he walked*, in Humility and Patience, in Purity and Holiness. Weak and Impotent we

2 Cor. xii. are, but *his Grace is sufficient for us*:

9. We can do nothing of ourselves, but

Phil. iv. *We can do all things through Christ that*
 13. *strengtheneth us*; and, in Confidence of this Assistance, we may venture to take to ourselves the Words of his fervent

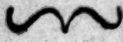
Rom. viii. Apostle, and say, *Who shall separate us*
 35. *from the Love of Christ?* Who, or what shall hinder us from obeying his Precepts, and from transcribing his Practice?

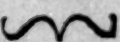
Ver. 37. *Shall Tribulation, or Distress, or Persecution, or Famine, or Nakedness, or Peril, or Sword?* Nay, but in all these things
 we

we are more than Conquerors, through S E R M.
Christ that loved us. V I.

If I am lifted up from the Earth (said John. xiii.
he, speaking of the powerful Efficacy of 32.
his Cross and Sufferings) *I will draw all*
Men after me : I will lift *Them* also up
above their earthly Affections and Pursuits,
and raise them into the Participation of a
Divine and Heavenly Nature.—Look
down then upon us from thy Cross, Blef-
sed *Jesu ! Draw us,* and *we will run after* Cant. i. 4.
thee, not only with willing, but Chear-
ful Minds; with Alacrity, and with Plea-
sure. We will trace all thy Steps from
Bethlehem to *Calvary*; we will imitate
thee, to the best of our Power, in all the
Stages and Conditions of thy Life, in what
thou didst, and in what thou sufferedst;
we will set thee before us in every Case,
and say, Would my Saviour have thus, or
thus behaved himself in these Circumstan-
ces? Would; he have yielded to such a
Temptation? or declined such a Conflict?
Would he have resented such an Injury;
or felt the least Discomposure of Mind,
upon such an Affront? Would he have

S E R M. been elated upon such a Success; have

VI.  sunk under such a Pressure; or consulted with Flesh and Blood on such an Occasion? Why then should I, who have his Example to guide, his Promise of an exceeding Reward to encourage, and his Grace to sustain me? Nay, but *draw us, Blessed Jesu, and we will run after thee! we will follow thee, O thou Lamb of God, whithersoever thou goest!* Particularly we will often resort to that lively affecting Representation of thy Death and Sufferings, the Sacrament of thy Body and Blood, which thou hast instituted for us. *There* we will inure ourselves to the Contemplation of *Christ* crucified, and to the Contempt of all the vain Glories of this World, which were, together with thee, nailed to thy Cross; of all the bewitching, but empty Pleasures of Life, with which we are surrounded. *There* we will endeavour to instruct ourselves in those holy Lessons of Resignation, Humility, Patience, and Perseverance unto Death, which thou in thy Gospel hast taught us; and to furnish ourselves

ourselves with such Spiritual Supplies of S E R M.
Grace, as may enable us to trace the VI.
suffering Example, which thou hast set 
us; that so resembling thee in Meekness,
Piety, and Purity *here*, we may also re-
semble thee in Happiness and Glory *here-*
after!

Now unto him that loved us, and Rev. i. 5,
washed us from our Sins in his own Blood, 6.
and hath made us Kings and Priests unto
God, and his Father; to Him be all Glory
and Honour ascribed in all Assemblies of
the Saints! Amen.

Some

Some REASONS assigned for
OUR SAVIOUR's

Appearing chiefly to the

APOSTLES after his Resurrection;

And his Manner of Conversing with
them, represented.

OUR SAVIOUR

Some Reasons assigned for
appearing chiefly to the
Attestation of his Resurrection
And his Manner of Governing
which is intended.

*Some Reasons assigned for our Saviour's
appearing chiefly to his Apostles after
his Resurrection; and his Manner of
conversing with them, represented:*

IN A
S E R M O N

Preached at

Westminster-Abbey,

On Easter Day, 1718.

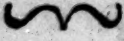
ACTS i. 3.

*To whom also he shewed himself alive af-
ter his Passion by many infallible Proofs,
being seen of them forty Days, and
speaking of the Things pertaining to
the Kingdom of God.*

'TIS a just Observation of St. Chry-
sostom, that though the Apostles
were allowed to be present with our
Lord,

S E R M.
VII.

S E R M. Lord, and to behold him, when ascend-

VII.  ing up into Heaven, yet they were not permitted to see him in the Act of arising from the Dead ; because their Testimony was requisite in the one Case, to establish our Faith, but not in the other. It was fit they should be Eyewitnesses of his Ascent ; else, they had not been able to attest the Truth of that Matter of Fact, the Knowledge of which they could not afterwards have attained otherwise than by Revelation ; but it was no ways necessary that they should see him, when he broke loose from the *Grave*, in order to their bearing witness of his Resurrection ; since it was sufficient to that Purpose, if they saw, and conversed with him, *after* he was risen. And that they did so, all the Evangelists inform us, particularly *St. Luke*, in the Words of the Text : *To whom also* [i. e. unto the Apostles, whom he had chosen, which are the concluding Words of the next preceding Verse] *he shewed himself alive after his Passion by many infallible Proofs, being seen of them*
forty

forty Days, and speaking of the Things SERM.
pertaining to the Kingdom of God. VII.

The Observations I intend to suggest from these Words, may be reduced under the three following Heads.

First, Our Saviour's continuing forty Days upon Earth, after he arose. I.

Secondly, His appearing throughout that time *chiefly* to his Apostles. And II.

Thirdly, The Manner of his spending his Time with them. Two Accounts are given of it in the Text; That by *many infallible Proofs* he convinced them of his being returned to Life, and that he discoursed to them of *things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.* III.

The *First* Point that may deserve your Attention is, our Saviour's Continuance upon Earth for forty Days after he arose. I.

That

S E R M. That he did so continue, is certain ;

VII. and as certain, that, for many wise Reasons, known to God alone, and as unnecessary, as they are impossible to be by us discovered, it was requisite that he should so continue : but those, which the Scripture hath pointed out to us, we may warrantably assign. And from thence it appears, that his Stay here upon Earth after his Resurrection, was intended for the Good of his Church, which he was about to establish, and for the Instruction of his Apostles in all things relating to the great Work, in which he was about to employ them.

They doubted of the Truth of his Resurrection ; and therefore he stayed to give them such convincing Proofs, and Assurances of it, as might enable them to convince others, and become Authentick Witnesses of that great Matter of Fact, upon which, as upon a chief Corner Stone, the whole Frame of his Religion was to be founded.

They laboured under great Prejudices, in relation to his Character and Suffer-

Sufferings, and expected that by Him SERM.
the Kingdom should have been restored VII.
to *Israel*. These Prejudices he himself
resolved to remove, and dispel; to in-
form them of the Spiritual Nature of
his Kingdom, of the Ends for which,
and the Methods by which, it was to be
erected and propagated.

Sorrow had overwhelmed their Hearts
upon the Loss of him; and therefore,
upon his Return to Life, he stayed some
time with them, to comfort and cheer
them. They were by Degrees to be
Weaned from their Fondness for his
Person, and their Desire of his Bodily
Presence; and to this end it was requi-
site, that he should not withdraw him-
self from their Sight at once, but ap-
pear, and disappear to them at fit In-
tervals; discontinuing, and resuming his
Conversation with them in such a man-
ner, as might best dispose them to be wil-
ling entirely to part with him.

He was leisurely to satisfy them, that
it was *expedient for him to go away*, since John xvi.
if he went not away, the Comforter would
not come; but if he departed, he would

SERM. *send him unto them; and that when He,*
 VII. *the Spirit of Truth, was come, he would*
 John xvi. *guide them into all Truth, bring all things*
 13. *to their Remembrance, and shew them*
things to come; would impart to them all
Spiritual Powers, Gifts, and Graces, and
fill them with all Consolation and Joy
in believing, and, by that means, make
an Amends to them for his own Bodily
Absence. For the Reception of this
Comforter, for the Entertainment of
this Heavenly Guest he was to prepare,
and qualify them, that, when he arriv-
ed, he might find them meet to be Par-
takers of his blessed Influences and Il-
luminations.

These Accounts of our Saviour's Continuance upon Earth for some time after he arose, are plainly enough asserted, or intimated in holy Writ; and therefore we may build upon them with Assurance. And may we not also, without Presumption, although with less Certainty, venture to say, That he intended, by this means, to add one yet further Proof to those he had already given,
 of

of his exceeding Love to his Spouse, the Church, of his great and disinterested

S E R M.

VII.

Concern for the Good of Souls? For, though from the Moment of his Resurrection he was entitled to that Glory, which his Humiliation had purchased, yet would he not immediately enter into it: He snatched not at the Reward, the high Reward of his Sufferings, with Eagerness and Haste; but delayed for some time his solemn Inauguration to the Regal Office, his taking Possession of the Joys of Heaven, and sitting on the Right Hand of God, while there was any thing yet left undone for his Church, and his Elect, which it was requisite for him to transact here in Person. A noble Instance of Self-denial! which seems to have wrought mightily in his Apostles, and to have produced excellent Fruits; particularly in *St. Paul*, who, though he earnestly desired to be *absent from the Body, and present with the Lord, to depart and be with Christ*; yet, for the Sake of his Flock here below, repressed those Desires, and was content-

SERM. ed to want, what he so earnestly long-

VII. ed after : *To abide in the Flesh* (said he

Phil. i.
24.

to them) *is more needful for You* ; and on that Account, and that only, he chose to abide in it.

Expedient therefore it was for the Disciples of *Christ*, that he should tarry *some time* with them after he arose : And *that time* was, it seems, *forty Days* ; a Circumstance, not to be neglected by us, since the Pen of St. *Luke* hath thought fit to record it ; probably, for this Reason,— Because *Moses*, and *Elijah*, the Types of *Christ*, on two very solemn Occasions, and *Christ* himself, just before he publicly exercised his Ministry, had for the same Number of Days retired into the Wilderness. Our Lord therefore having, in Conformity with these Types, taken forty Days to prepare himself for the Discharge of his Prophetick Offices on Earth, did in like manner retire, as it were, and separate himself for forty Days also, e're he entered upon his Regal and Mediatorial Offices in Heaven, and there sat at the
Right

Right Hand of Power, making Intercession to God for us. SERM.
VII.

But I proceed to what I have to offer to you on the

Second Particular, Our Saviour's appearing, throughout this time, chiefly to his Apostles. II.

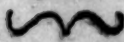
There are indeed two Instances of his appearing to others than the Apostles, *i. e.* to the Women at the Sepulchre, and to the Five hundred Brethren mentioned by *St. Paul*: To which some add a third, his appearing to two Disciples on the way towards *Emmaus*; the Relation of *St. Luke* (as they apprehend) leaving it doubtful, whether these were of the Number of the Eleven, or only Disciples at large. But these Instances were rare, and little Stress therefore is laid upon them by the holy Writers; who generally place the whole Proof of the Resurrection of *Christ*, upon the Apostles Testimony, because they saw him most frequently, and conversed most fa-

SERMON. miliarly with him: and therefore he is

VII. said here, by St. *Luke*, to have shewed
 himself alive to the *Apostles* whom he had
 chosen; and by St. *Peter* to have shewed
 himself openly, not to all the *People*, but
 unto *Witnesses* chosen before of God, even
 to Us, [i. e. to Us, the *Apostles*] who did
 eat and drink with him after he arose from
 the Dead.

Now the Reasons of his appearing
 chiefly to the *Apostles*, are manifest:
 they have been already in some measure
 suggested; and there may be Occasion,
 in what follows, further to explain them.
 But, why he appeared not to *Others*, be-
 sides the *Apostles*, why not to such as
 were averse to his Person and Doctrine,
 to the *Sanhedrim* itself, or even to all the
People, the whole Body of the *Jews*
 then assembled at the Passover, is a Que-
 stion, that may seem to require, and
 deserve a particular Answer: since Infi-
 delity on this Head finds room to object,
 That the most effectual Way of proving
 his *Resurrection*, had been, to have made
 his *Enemies* his *Witnesses*; whereas our
 Saviour

Saviour manifested himself only to his SERM.
Friends and Followers. VII.

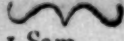
He did so, and with very good Reason. For, 

1. It was no ways fit, that such a Favour should be indulged to his Murderers; to those, who had treated this Messenger, and his Message, with Scorn and Blasphemy, had resisted the Evidence of all his Miracles, and notwithstanding the Sanctity of his Life and Doctrine, had pursued him to his Cross with such a Complication of Obstinacy, Malice, and Cruelty, as can in no other Instance be paralleled. Had *Christ* appeared, after he arose to Men of so flagitious a Character, his Conduct, in that Case, would have been so far from promoting the Interests of his Gospel (which is the Doctrine of Holiness) that it would have given a great, and dangerous Encouragement to Wickedness, to Mens *continuing* and abounding in Sin, *that so Grace might abound.* So far was our Lord from being obliged to afford those who crucified him, such an extra-

S E R M. ordinary Proof of his Resurrection, that he

VII. might with great Justice have denied them any Evidence at all of it, and not have suffered even the Testimony of his Apostles concerning it to have reached them. But,

2. The only Reason assignable, why God should have tried such an Experiment as this, is, a Probability of converting the whole *Jewish* Nation by the Means of it. But Experience, and our Lord's express Decision in the Case assure us, that this End would not have been attained by it. Had he appeared at Mid-day *to all the People*, yet *all the People* would not have believed in him. The sincere and honest-hearted *Jews* would have surrendered to such an Evidence, as they did afterwards to that which was given by the Apostles; but the malicious and obstinate would have found out Colours and Excuses, to evade the Force of it. What! (might one of them have said) though there has been an Apparition in the Likeness of *Jesus*, whom we crucified, must we necessarily from thence conclude, that he is really alive? No such matter!

matter! This is no new thing; Sorcery hath S E R M.
 often effected it: *Samuel* was dead, and VII.
 in his Grave, even then, when the Witch 
 of *Endor* made his Likeness appear be- I Sam. xxviii.
 fore *Saul*. Thus would they have rea- 14.
 soned against their own Reason, and their
 very Senses, and have kept their Infideli-
 ty, in spite of such a Demonstration; ac-
 cording to that Saying of our Lord, which
 he uttered, not perhaps without an Eye
 to this very Supposition: *If they bear not* Luke xvi.
Moses and the Prophets, neither will they 31.
be persuaded, though one rose (and appear-
ed to them) from the Dead.

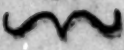
In Fact, the Resurrection of *Lazarus*,
 and their conversing with him afterwards
 had not convinced them; and we may
 be sure, that they, who could impute
 this great Miracle, and the others wrought
 by our Saviour, while alive, to the Pow-
 er of Magick, and a Confederacy with
Beelzebub, would have found out a Way
 of arguing themselves out of the Certain-
 ty of our Lord's Resurrection, though
 they themselves had had an Ocular Affu-
 rance concerning it. However

3. Should

SERM. 3. Should we suppose, that such a

VII.  glaring Proof of his Resurrection could not have been resisted by them, yet it ought not to have been indulged to them for this very Reason; because it was *irresistible*. God never intended to *compel*, but only to *persuade* us into a Reception of Divine Truth; and we are properly said to be persuaded, when we close with such Motives and Arguments as are sufficient indeed to convince us, but such however, by which we need not be convinced, unless we please. All beyond this is Force, not Persuasion; and is very unfit therefore to be applied to Creatures endued with Liberty and Reason, and who are to be rewarded, or punished, according as they employ it. The Belief of the Gospel was designed to be the Test of sincere and ingenuous Minds, and as such, was to be attended with mighty Blessings and Benefits; for *blest are they which have not seen, and yet have believed*. But what Reason, what Room is there for blessing those, who shall on that Account alone *believe* the Gospel,

Joh. xx.
29.

Gospel, because they are surrounded every S E R M.
Way with so much Light and Conviction, VII.
that it is absolutely impossible for them 
not to believe it? Such a Faith can have
no Degree of Desert in it, and is there-
fore absolutely incapable of any Reward.

The true Question in this Case is,
Whether the Proof of *Christ's* Resur-
rection, by the Testimony of the Apa-
stles, be not satisfactory and full, abun-
dantly full to all the Purposes of Con-
viction? If it be, are we not very unrea-
sonable, and absurd in complaining,
that a Fact was not attested with ten
times more Evidence than was needful?
Nay, but who art thou, O Man, who,
whilst thou acknowledgest the Wisdom
and Goodness of God to be sufficiently
justified in his own Method, wilt yet
prescribe to him the Use of thine, be-
cause it seems to thee more fit and conve-
nient? At this rate, how many things
are there, which we (full of our own
Wisdom and Schemes) should think fit
to have been done, which yet God hath
not thought fit to do for us? We per-
haps

S E R M. haps may think it very convenient, that

VII. we should at first have been made impeccable, and secured from falling: We, upon a View of the several Heresies that have sprung from the Misinterpretation of Holy Writ, may judge, it would have been much better for the Church, if the Scripture had been so clear in every Point, that no well-meaning Man could have mistaken the Sense of it: at least, we might be apt to imagine it highly expedient, that God should have appointed some Infallible Judge, to whom we might have resorted for the clearing up of all Difficulties, and ending all Controversies. But in all these

1 Cor. iii. Cases *the Wisdom of Man is Foolishness*
19. *with God*; for he hath ordered things quite otherwise. He placed us indeed in such a State at first, from which we could not fall, without the utmost Folly and Weakness; but from which however fall we did, as soon almost as we were possessed of that Happiness. He gave us a Rule of Faith and Manners, easy enough to be understood by honest humble

humble Minds; but capable of being SERM.
strained, perverted, and abused to ill VII.
Purposes by proud opinionative Read-
ers. He left every Man to judge for
himself in Matters of Religion; and yet
so, as to leave him without Excuse also,
if he made an ill Use of that Judgment.
And in like manner hath he dealt with
us, in relation to those great Matters of
Fact, upon which the Truth of our Re-
ligion is founded: He hath built the Be-
lief of them upon such Proofs, as cannot
fail of convincing those, who are sincere,
and willing to be informed; and yet
such as leave room for little Exceptions
and Cavils to Men of perverse and dis-
putative Tempers, who will not allow
of any Evidence, in behalf of Christia-
nity, how strong and irrefragable so-
ever, if they can but imagine to them-
selves any Circumstance, whereby it
might possibly have been made yet some-
what stronger; and do, therefore, pre-
tend to doubt of the Truth of *Christ's*
Resurrection, because he did not appear
to all the People, to his very Persecutors
and

SERM. and Murderers. I have proved, that it
 VII. was highly improper, unnecessary, and
 unreasonable, that he should so have ap-
 peared; and that it was expedient, high-
 ly expedient (because in all respects
 sufficient) that he should appear only to
 his Friends and Followers, and, amongst
 them, chiefly to his Apostles, upon the
 single Credit of whose Testimony the
 Belief of this great Article was to de-
 pend. It remains that I should, in the

III. *Third* and last place, consider, How
 our Saviour spent his time with them.

The Text tells us, that he employed
 it, partly in giving them *many infallible*
Proofs of his being returned to Life, and
 partly in discoursing to them of things
pertaining to the Kingdom of God. By
 the *one* he enabled them to prove the Di-
 vine Authority of his Mission, and by
 the *other* he instructed them in all the
 Parts of his heavenly Doctrine; and by
both together he qualified them for a suc-
 cessful Propagation of Christianity.

I. He

I. He shewed himself alive to them S E R M.

ἐν πολλοῖς τεκμηρίοις, by many clear Signs VII.
 and Tokens, *many infallible Proofs* (as
 our Translation renders it.) And such
 indeed they were in every respect. For
 he appeared to them, not *once* only, but
often; not only to *some* of them, when
 separated from the rest, but to *all* of
 them, when assembled together, and
 when they were capable of satisfying
 each other by Enquiries made at the
 same time into the Truth of the same
 Fact, and consequently of giving an
 united Testimony to it. He appeared
 to them not in the Dark, as Spectres do,
 but in broad Day-light; sometimes at
 Places where he had before appointed to
 meet them, sometimes occasionally, as
 they were travelling on the Way, or sit-
 ting at Meat, when their Minds were
 freest from the Clouds of Melancholy,
 and their Imaginations least apt to be
 imposed upon. He conversed with them
 at such times in the most easy and fami-
 liar Manner: He eat and drank with
 them, and gave them, by that means,
 Leisure

SER.M. Leisure to recover themselves from that

VII. Surprize, and those Fears, which the first
 Sight of him might occasion, and with
 composed Minds to hearken to all he
 should say to them. He not only re-
 peated these Conversations often, he
 continued them long; as appears from
 the Subject of some of them, particu-
 larly of That, where he is said to have
 begun at Moses, and all the Prophets, and
 to have expounded to them in all the Scri-
 ptures, the things concerning himself. And,
 that nothing might be wanting to satisfy
 them to the uttermost, he was content-
 ed, not only to be seen and heard, but
 even handled by them: *Reach hither,*
 said he to one of them in the Presence
 of the rest, *thy Finger, and behold my*
Hands, and reach hither thy Hand, and
thrust it into my Side, and be not faithless,
but believing. Is it possible for Scepti-
 cism itself to indulge its wild Suspicions
 so far, as to think, the Apostles might
 all this time be in a Dream, or under a
 strong and continued Delusion? They
 who think, or speak thus, seem to be
 under

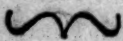
Luke
xxiv. 27.

Joh. xx.
27.

under a Judicial Infatuation themselves: SERM.
for they might, with as much Probabi- VII.
lity and Colour of Reason, affirm, that
all the Facts, recorded in the gravest and
most authentick Writers, are Figments,
and the mere Inventions of wanton Pens;
that there is no way of distinguishing
between Reality and Appearance, even
in the common Occurrences of Life,
and consequently no Difference between
a Romance and an History. Certain it is,
that, unless the Apostles be admitted as
good Witnesses in such a Case as this,
and the Truth of what they relate be
allowed, there is an End of the Credi-
bility of all Human Testimony.

2. But as our Saviour, during his forty Days Stay on Earth, fully enabled his Apostles to attest his Resurrection, so did he qualify them duly to preach his Doctrine; for he taught them τὰ περὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ, *the Things pertaining to the Kingdom of God*, i. e. to the Gospel Dispensation, of which they were to be the Ministers, and to his Church, which they were to gather, constitute, and go-

S E R M. vern. Of these things the Apostles were

VII.  then very ignorant ; and though for their full and final Instruction, our Lord referred them to the Comforter, yet he himself was willing previously to instruct and comfort them ; to teach them the first Rudiments of Christian Knowledge, and to fill their Hearts with longing Expectations of those further Degrees of Light and Joy, with which they were afterwards to be blessed. This Promise he had made them the very Night before his Passion. *I will not leave you comfortless*, said he, even for so long a time, as till the promised Comforter shall come ; *I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the World seeth me no more ; but ye see me.—At that Day* (the Day of my Return to you) *You shall know that I am in my Father, and You in Me.* Ye shall understand somewhat of that Mystical Union that is between my Father and Me, and between Me and my Church, the Society of Christian Believers. Without all Question, what he then promised, he now performed ; and therefore,

Joh. xiv.
18, &c.

therefore, we may be sure, discountsed SERM.
to them concerning the great Articles VII.
of our Faith, the high Mysteries of Chri-
stianity.

The Scripture Accounts of these things
are short: However, even from these
short Accounts we learn, that he com-
manded them to make Profelytes in all
Nations, and to baptize them in the Matth.
Name of the Father, and of the Son, and xxviii:
of the Holy Ghost: And we cannot
doubt but that, when he directed this
Form, he made some Discovery to them
concerning the Nature and Offices of
these Three Persons of the ever blessed
Trinity, in whose Names they were to
baptize.

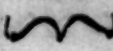
He told them, that *all Power was given* Matth.
him, in Heaven, and in Earth; and in xxviii. 18.
virtue of that Power, he gave them
also Power, not of baptizing only, but
of remitting and retaining Sins. He
sent them, as he was sent by the Father;
and sufficiently directed them to send
others, as they were sent, who were in
like manner to continue that Mission, by

S E R M. the Promise he made to *be with them always, even to the End of the World.*

Matth. xxviii. 20. The Sacrament of his Body and Blood he had instituted, while living; and now therefore he celebrated it together with them: *For he took Bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave unto them, and was known of them in thus breaking of Bread:* a Phrase, which in the *Acts* manifestly refers to the Eucharist; and may justly therefore be understood of it here, in the Story of our Saviour.

Luke xxiv. 30, 35. In a word, *he opened their Understandings, that they might understand the Scriptures, and all the Prophecies concerning himself;* and he bad them *teach all Nations to observe all things that he had commanded them:* Which two Passages comprize the Knowledge of what relates both to the Doctrine and Discipline of the Church, both to the Faith and Practice of a *Christian.*

But the chief Way of our Saviour's spending his Time with the Apostles, after he arose from the Dead, was, by affording them these Illustrious, these
Infal-

Infalible Proofs of the Truth of his SERM.
Resurrection. And God be thanked VII.
that he did so! since by thus settling 
his wavering Disciples in an unshaken
Belief of this Truth, he enabled them,
with the utmost Firmness and Constan-
cy, to propagate their Belief of it, and
even to seal their Testimony with their
Blood; and hath by that means ex-
tended the Efficacy and Influence of
those Infalible Proofs to *us* also, who
live near Seventeen Ages, after they
were given. *Our* Conviction depended
upon *Theirs*, is derived from it, and
proportioned to it. And in virtue there-
fore of the Evidence indulged to them
(not for their Sakes alone, but for the
Sake of all succeeding *Christians*) do
we meet here this Day, with Joy and
Thankfulness to celebrate this Festival,
and to profess our Faith in Him, that
was dead, but is alive; was crucified,
but is risen; and now sitteth at the Right
Hand of the Father.

Blessed indeed, in many respects, be-
yond us, blessed were the Eyes that saw

SERM. these Things, and the Ears that heard

VII. them, for they saw, and heard, and believed; but blessed also are *We*, who receive their Testimony, blessed even beyond them, in this respect, if *not seeing, we do yet believe*. The Lips of Truth have assured us, that in this Case there is one Beatitude more reserved for Us, than belonged even to the Apostles themselves, if we believe the Resurrection of *Christ* upon their Report; whereas They believed it only, upon the Testimony of their Senses.—Having therefore these Promises, dearly beloved, wait with Patience, *that the Tryal of your Faith* (as St. Peter speaks) *may be found unto Praise and Honour and Glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ! whom having not seen, I trust, ye love; in whom, tho' now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoyce with Joy unspeakable, and full of Glory; receiving, in his due time, the End of your Faith, even the Salvation of your Souls.*

1 Pet. i.
7, 8.

Rom. xv.
13.

And may the God of Hope fill you with all Joy and Peace in believing, that you may

may abound in Hope, through the Power SERM.
of the Holy Ghost. VII.

I cannot dismiss this Reflection, without applying it to the blessed Sacrament, of which we are going to partake, and by partaking of which, we profess in a most especial Manner to exercise our Faith in an invisible *Jesus*. He is there really, effectually, though Spiritually, present; the Eye of Faith can behold him, though that of Sense cannot: for *his Flesh is Meat indeed, and his Blood is Drink indeed.* John vi. 55. That Bread, and that Wine, which he there imparts to us, shall become his very Body and Blood, in such a Sense, as he intended it, to every worthy, and faithful Receiver: It shall convey to us all the Benefits of his Body broken, and his Blood poured out on the Cross; and unite us to him in our Bodies and Souls, after such a Wonderful Manner, as none but they, who feel it, can conceive, and even they, who conceive it, cannot express. Let us look then through the outward Symbols or Signs, to the Thing

S E R M. signified by them ; and carry in our Ears,

VII. as we approach the Holy Table, that
Voice of our Saviour to his doubting Disciple, *Be not faithless, but believing.* Blessed and Happy is He, who, in this Instance also, though he doth not see, yet doth believe ; he shall be vitally nourished, and cherished by the Food of this Paschal Lamb, and his Soul shall be made Joyful in the Strength of this new Wine.

To that *Lamb of God, without Spot, or Blemish*, whose Sacrifice we are now about to commemorate, and represent, even the Lamb that was *slain for our Sins, and raised again for our Justification*, as on this Day, together with the Father, and the Divine Spirit, be ascribed all Honour, Might, Adoration, and Praise, now and evermore.

MIRACLES

MIRACLES

The most proper Way of proving the

DIVINE AUTHORITY

OF ANY

RELIGION.

MIRACLES

DIVINE AUTHORITY

OF

RELIGION

*Miracles the most proper Way of proving
the Divine Authority of any Religion.*

A
S E R M O N

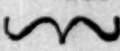
Preached at

Westminster-Abbey,

On *Whitsunday*, 1716.

MARK xvi. 20.

*And they went forth and preached every
where; the Lord working with them,
and confirming the Word with Signs
following.*

I N these Words, which shut up the SERM.
Gospel of St. *Mark*, we have an Ac- VIII.
count of the Means, by which the Preach- 
ing

SERM. ing of the Apostles became so wonder-
 VIII. fully Operative and Successful. It was
 not from any mighty Talent of Persua-
 sion, any extraordinary Faculty of Reasoning, with which they were endued; it was not by any intrinsick Evidences of Truth, which the distinguishing Doctrines they preached carried with them; nor by any other Method purely Human and Natural; but by a Divine Power and Assistance, which accompanied them in every Step they took, and miraculously blessed their Endeavours. *The Lord worked with them, and confirmed the Word with Signs following.*

By Signs, in Holy Writ, are meant all such wonderful Operations, as are above the Skill of Man to contrive, above the Power of any thing in Nature, any thing but the God of Nature himself, or some Agent by him specially Commissioned and empowered, to perform. Such as speaking strange Languages on the sudden, the Miracle of this Day; curing inveterate Diseases in an Instant, by a Word only; giving Life
 I to

to the Dead, or Eyes to one that was SERM.
 born blind. These things being done VIII.
 to signify who are appointed by God, as
 the Messengers of his Will to Men, are on
 that Account fitly termed *Signs*; and of
these the Holy Scripture every where
 speaks, as the most proper and full Evi-
 dences of a Divine Mission and Autho-
 rity.

When *Moses* was sent by God to the
 Children of *Israel*, he desires some Cre-
 dentials, by which it might appear,
 that God had sent him; and God, in
 Answer to his Request, arms him with
 the Power of Miracles: *Cast thy Rod up-* Exod. iv.
on the Ground, says he, *and it shall be-* 3. 5.
come a Serpent. — *That they may believe*
that the Lord God of their Fathers hath
appeared unto thee.

Our Saviour constantly appeals to his
 Miracles, as to a clear and sufficient
 Proof of his Doctrine: *The Works that* Joh. v. 36.
I do, says he, *They bear Witness of me.*
 And he carries the Argument so far, as
 to make the whole Guilt of Mens Infi-
 delity turn singly on this Article. — *If*
I had

SERM. I had not done among them, says he, the

VIII. Works which none other Man did, they

had not had Sin.

John xv.

24.

And thus also reasoned his *Apostles* and *Evangelists*. *Jesus of Nazareth*, says

Acts ii.

22.

St. Peter, a Man approved of God among you by Miracles, and Wonders, and

Acts xiv.

3.

Signs, which God did by him in the midst of you. The Lord gave Testimony, says

St. Luke, to the Word of his Grace, and granted Signs and Wonders to be done by

the *Apostles Hands*. And here in the Text, They went forth, says St. Mark,

and preached every where; the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word

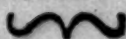
with Signs following.

Miracles therefore being the Foundation, upon which both the Mosaic and Christian Revelations stand; it may be of use to shew, how properly they were pitched upon by God for this purpose. And this will appear, if we consider

I. First, The common Sense and Opinion of Mankind on this Head.

Secondly,

Secondly, The General Nature of this
Sort of Evidence. And



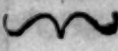
Thirdly, Some peculiar Properties and
Characters of it. III.

I.
First, What the Common Sense and Reasoning of Mankind has been on this Head, will appear from this single Reflection; That all Religions, whether true or false, not only those of *Moses* and *Christ*, but even the Heathenish Superstitions of every kind have, at their first setting out, endeavoured to countenance themselves by Real, or Pretended Miracles. *Numa* at *Rome*, *Amida* and *Brama* in the *East*, and *Mango Copal* in *Peru*, did, as History informs us, thus go about to persuade their Followers into a Belief of those Religious Opinions, which they introduced, and into the Practice of their several Sacred Rites and Ceremonies. Even *Mahomet* himself is said to have made some faint Attempts this Way, though, when he mis-

sed

SERM. sed of Success, he retreated to the great
 VIII. and standing Miracle of the *Alcoran*,
 which was, he said, sent immediately
 from Heaven to him by the Angel *Ga-*
briel.— So that Miracles have been se-
 cretly and unanimously agreed upon by
 all Men, as the proper Medium of prov-
 ing any Religion to be of Divine Ap-
 pointment; else, the Founders of all
 Religions would not thus indifferently
 have appealed to them; nor would they,
 who embraced those Religions, have so
 universally surrendered themselves up to
 their Authority.

I know, this Argument is by the
 Enemies of Revelation turn'd another
 Way, and made use of to prove, that
 since *All* Religions have, at their first
 Rise, equally pretended to Miracles, and
Most of them without Grounds; there-
 fore the *rest* have done so too: at least,
 that this Way of Proof, which hath so
 often deceived Men, can never with any
 Certainty be relied upon. But this
 surely is a very unreasonable Way of ar-
 guing; since, at the same rate, it might
 be

be proved, that there is no such thing as S E R M.
Truth, or Reason in the World: for all VIII.
Men on all sides lay claim to it; and yet 
the far greater Part of Mankind must
needs be deceived. The proper Infe-
rence in this Case is, not that, because
most Men, who would be thought Ma-
sters of Truth, are not, therefore there
is no such thing as Truth; but on the
contrary, that Truth is somewhere to be
found, else all Men every where would
not equally lay claim to it.

There are many Empiricks in the
World, who pretend to infallible Me-
thods of curing all Patients. Because
these are Cheats and Impostors, does it
follow, that there are no able and skil-
ful Physicians, no healing Virtues in
Herbs and Minerals? Or rather, may it
not from hence be strongly concluded,
that there must certainly be an Art
of Medicine, built upon true Princi-
ples, and founded in the Nature of
things; because so many Men every
Day advance groundless Claims to it,
and so many others give in to their

SERM. Frauds and Delusions? Were there no

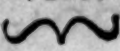
VIII. Real and True Remedies, there would
 be no Foundation for such Men to amuse
 the World with false ones; but they
 would, as soon as they appeared, be im-
 mediately exploded.

In like manner, if no true Miracles
 had ever been done in Proof of a Di-
 vine Revelation, it is impossible to con-
 ceive, how so many false Religions should
 have been supported by the Pretence of
 them, or how the Argument from Mi-
 racles should at all times have had so
 strong an Influence upon the Minds of
 Men. But

II.

Secondly, As the *Common Sense and Opinion* of Mankind favours this sort of Proof; so will it appear to be in itself highly *Reasonable, and Necessary*, if we consider the *General Nature* of it.

When any Person pretends a Divine Commission to publish a New Doctrine; in order to procure its Reception, tis requisite he should be furnished with
 some

some competent Motives of Credibility; S E R M.
he must, by some Infallible Sign or To- VIII.
ken, shew, that he was really sent on 
that Errand, and not expect to be be-
lieved on his own bare Word and Af-
firmation. Now this Sign, or Token,
what can it be, but his doing somewhat,
which it is on all Hands confessed,
that no one, but God, can do? that is,
in other Terms, how can a Man prove
his Mission, but by a Miracle? Will it
be said, that the Doctrine he brings,
may be so pure and holy, and every
way worthy of God, as to carry the
Stamp and Evidence of its own Divine
Original? that the very Nature of the
Message may clearly and fully evince,
from whence the Messenger came? I
see not how this can well be. A Doc-
trine may be very Holy and Good, and
every way agreeable to the Conceptions
we have of God, and yet not be of Di-
vine Revelation. The Philosophers a-
mong the Heathens uttered many such
Truths, as might have become them,
had they been really Inspired; and yet

SERM. we believe not, for this Reason, that

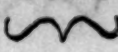
VIII. they *were* Inspired, but that they spake
merely from the Dictates of their own Reason, and from the General Consent of the Wisest Part of Mankind : and so may any other Man also, let the Doctrine he teaches be never so just and holy, unless he produces somewhat beside the Doctrine itself, to prove that it was revealed to him. For though the Badness of any Doctrine, and its Disagreeableness to the Eternal Rules of Right Reason, be a certain Sign that it did *not* come from God, yet the Goodness of it can be no infallible Proof that it *did*. Indeed when a good Man publishes a good Doctrine, and affirms that he had it from God, we may, for his own Sake, and for his Doctrine's Sake, be disposed to give Credit to him ; we may be inclined, perhaps, rather to be of Opinion, that the Thing is as he says, than that it is not ; but we cannot be wrought up into a firm Belief, an unshaken Assurance concerning it, merely by his Affirmation. He may, at the
Bottom,

Bottom, not be so good a Man as he SERM.
seems to be; and may therefore (it is VIII.
possible) intend to deceive me; or he 
may have been himself deceived, and
mistaken a Dream, or strong Imagina-
tion, for a Reality. Such things have
sometimes happened, and such things
may therefore happen again; and, while
I have these Doubts and Possibilities be-
fore my Eyes, tis impossible I should
embrace his Authority with the full and
entire Assent of my Mind. But if to
his own solemn Affirmation he adds
the Performance of some Work, which,
all things considered, I have the utmost
Reason to think he could not perform,
without immediate Divine Assistance;
that indeed, and nothing less than that,
is a Proof, which I ought not, and am
not able to withstand.

It will, perhaps, be farther objected,
that, if the Doctrine taught appears to
be in itself good, and reasonable, 'tis
no matter whether it is proved to be of
immediately Divine Authority. For a
good Man will receive a Doctrine evi-

SERM. dently good and reasonable, whether a-
 VIII. ny one be divinely Inspired to preach it,
 or not: and a Doctrine evidently evil
 and absurd, he will not receive, on the
 Account of whatever pretended Inspira-
 tion. And therefore, what need of
 Miracles to make way for an Opinion,
 which, if agreeable to Reason, will make
 its own Way without their Assistance;
 and if contrary to Reason, can never be
 entertained by a reasonable Creature,
 though it should have ten thousand Mi-
 racles to support it?

Now it must be confessed, that this
 Objection is so far of Force, as it relates
 to *Moral* Truths, and to whatever is
 discoverable by the Light of Natural
 Reason. There is indeed no Necessity
 for Miracles to induce a Belief of *These*;
 nor is it pretended, that God ever em-
 ployed them to this Purpose, to con-
 vince Men either of his Being, or Provi-
 dence, or of the Eternal Differences of
 Good and Evil; because *These* Truths
 were of themselves sufficiently obvious
 and plain, and needed not a Divine Te-
 stimony

stimony to make them plainer. But the SERM.
Truths, which are necessary in this VIII.
Manner to be attested, are those, 
which are of Positive Institution; those,
which, if God had not pleased to reveal
them, Human Reason could not have
discovered; and those, which, even now
they are revealed, Human Reason can-
not fully account for, and perfectly
comprehend. Such, for Example, are the
Doctrines of Baptism and the Supper of
the Lord, of the Resurrection of the
same Body, of the Distinction of Per-
sons in the Unity of the Divine Essence,
and of the Salvation of Mankind by the
Blood and Intercession of *Jesus*. It is
this kind of Truth that God is proper-
ly said to Reveal; Truths, of which,
unless revealed, we should have always
continued ignorant; and 'tis in order
only to prove these Truths to have been
really revealed, that we affirm Miracles
to be Necessary. And though in the Bo-
dy of the Revelation itself, known and
unknown Truths may be mixed, Do-
ctrines Evident by the Light of Nature,

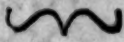
S E R M. with such as we receive only by Inspira-

VIII. tion ; yet 'tis for the Sake of the Latter
 of these, that Miracles must be done,
 not at all on the Account of the Former.
 So that Reason being no Competent
 Judge of those Doctrines, to the Con-
 firmation of which Miracles are specially
 adapted, cannot, I say, by examining
 into the Nature of such Doctrines, de-
 termine, that a Proof of them by Mi-
 racles is needless.

Hitherto I have only considered the
 General Nature of Miracles, as they
 are Acts of Supernatural Power, ne-
 cessarily attendant on Revealed Doctrines,
 in order to promote their Reception.

Thirdly, I proceed now, in the last
 place, to shew, how well they are
 suited to this Purpose, by reason of
 some *Peculiar Characters* and *Properties*
 that belong to them. For, *First*, They
 are extremely fit to awaken Men's At-
 tention.— *Secondly*, They are the short-
 est and most Expeditionary way of Proof.—
 And, *Thirdly*, They are an Argument of
 the most Universal Force and Efficacy,
 equally

equally reaching all Capacities and Understandings. SERM.
VIII.

I. In order to the Propagation of a  New Doctrine, the first thing requisite is, To create Attention, and rouse the Minds of Men, possessed with Prejudices, immersed in Pleasures, or Business, into an impartial Consideration of what is proposed. And this is best effected by Miracles; which being strange and unusual Events, cannot fail of drawing Mens Eyes towards the Doer of them, and of commanding their Attention and Observance. Curiosity is the first Step towards Conviction; and when once Men are possessed with a due Regard for the Messenger, they will be sure to listen carefully to the Message he brings. The Fathers of the Eastern Mission knew this well, and being therefore destitute of the Power of Miracles, which might excite Men to enquire after their Opinions; and infuse a Reverence for their Persons, endeavoured to make up this Disadvantage another way, and gain Admission into the Presence

S E R M. fence of the Princes and great Men of
 VIII. the East, by some Curious and Surprizing
 Works of Art. And having in this manner raised an Opinion of themselves first, they preached the Gospel with some Degree of Success afterwards : their Performances in Mechanicks and Astronomy being instead of Miracles to them, by which they procured a favourable Hearing of the Doctrines they afterwards delivered.

2. 'Tis another great Advantage, which belongs to Miracles, that they are the shortest and most expeditious Way of Proof. All other Ways of evincing the Divine Original of any Doctrine (supposing there were any such) must needs be long and laborious ; such as it will take up much Time fully to explain and clear ; and such therefore, as must operate but slowly, and can make no great Advances, in any one Man's Life, towards converting the World. For Instance, suppose the Truth and Credibility of a Revealed Doctrine could be made out, by shewing its Connection
 with

with, and Dependence upon other SERM.
 Truths, and by a regular Deduction of VIII.
 it, through a long Train of Consequen-
 ces, from known and avowed Principles of Reason; yet would this be a very tedious and irksome Task, and would in a long Time gain but a little Ground upon an opinionative and disputing World. Had this been the Method made use of to propagate Christianity at first, how would the Course of it have been retarded? How impossible had it been for the Apostles to have obeyed their great Master's Commands, and to have preached the Gospel to all Nations? At this rate, it is probable, that, instead of traversing the several Parts of the Earth, and reducing Multitudes of every Nation and Climate to the Obedience of *Christ*, they had stuck in that very Spot, where they first entered upon their Ministry, and begun and finished all their Labours within the short Limits of *Palestine*. But by the Help of *Miracles*, they were enabled effectually to discharge their high Office:
these

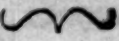
SERM. *these* were Engines fitted and proportioned to the Work assigned to them.

~~~~~

One Dead Man raised, or Blind Man restored to Sight, brought over Thousands to the Faith, who saw the thing done; and ten Thousands came in afterwards, upon the Report of it. Other kinds of Proofs were fitted only leisurely to loosen the Knots, which the Disputers of this World tied, in order to give the Apostles Disturbance in the Execution of their Ministry. But Miracles, like the Hero's Sword, divided these Entanglings at a Stroke, and at once made their Way through them.

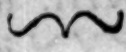
3. The Third and last Advantage of this Way of Proof is, its *Universal Force and Efficacy*, as being equally adapted to all Capacities and Understandings.—Rational and Discursive Methods are fit only to be made use of upon Philosophers, Men of deep Reason and improved Minds; the generality of Mankind would be utterly insensible of their Force. The Lower, that is, the far greater Part of the World, are too much  
taken



taken up in providing the Necessaries of S E R M.  
Life, to be at Leisure to consider long VIII.  
Consequences, and weigh Arguments.   
Or had they Opportunities for such a  
Search, yet have they not the Abilities  
requisite to pursue it. To them there-  
fore some plainer, and more sensible  
Proof must be addressed; somewhat  
that lies level to their Capacities, and of  
which they understand the Force at the  
first Proposal: and such a sort of Argu-  
ment is that, which is drawn from Mi-  
racles. There is no Man of so rude and  
unpolished a Mind, no Man so stupid  
and insensible, but can carry his Reason-  
ing thus far; That, whoever does such  
things, as he could not do, unless God  
were with him, if at the same time he  
affirms, that he received such and such  
Doctrines from God, we ought to be-  
lieve him. There is no Subtlety, no  
Reach of Thought requisite, to make  
this Reflection; and this single Refle-  
ction is sufficient to make a Man a *Chri-  
stian*. Whereas, if the World must have  
been convinced of old, as the Men, who  
doubt

SERM. doubt of every thing, and disbelieve e-  
 VIII. very thing, expect we should convince  
 ~~~~~ them now, by strict Demonstrations, and  
 long intricate Reasonings; it is certain,
 that the greatest Part of Mankind had
 lain under an inevitable Necessity of con-
 tinuing Infidels.

We see then, that *the Foundation of
 God standeth sure*, that the Proof of the
 Christian Faith by Miracles is sound and
 satisfactory. Let us adhere to it steddi-
 ly, and devoutly adore the divine Wis-
 dom and Goodness, which contrived it
 for our Sakes! Let us not be moved by
 the little Cavils, and Exceptions, with
 which perverse and unreasonable Men
 are used to encounter it; but let us re-
 member, that, in this State of Imper-
 fection, there is scarce any Truth so
 bright and clear, but that an Industrious
 Stirrer up of Doubts may do somewhat
 towards clouding and darkening it. Let
 us not *fit in the Seat, nor stand in the
 Way, nor walk in the Council of these
 Ungodly*; who studiously undermine
 Principles, and delight to affront the
 Common

Common Sense of Mankind : who set SERM.
up for a Repute by disbelieving every VIII.
thing, and are resolved to pay a Regard 
to nothing, but their own deep Penetra-
tion and Prudence. Let us preserve our-
selves free from that sort of Caution and
Reserve, which, lest it should be im-
posed upon by false Motives of Credi-
bility, will close with none ; and for
very Fear of being deceived, takes the
unavoidable Way towards being deceiv-
ed, by equally suspecting every Thing.
God defend us from such a kind of Wa-
riness as this ! and grant that we may
foolishly entertain some Falshood toge-
ther with Truth, rather than be Wise
to that Degree, as to esteem every thing
a Falshood ! that we may be weak
enough to believe several Doctrines in
Religion, that are Erroneous and Vain,
rather than be so backward and hardy
as to believe nothing at all ! For cer-
tainly, as downright Credulity and
Weakness has much the Advantage of
Infidelity, with regard to the Ease and
Peace of Mind it affords us in *This*
World,

SERM. World, so is it more likely, if it errs,
VIII. to be overlooked and pardoned by God
in *Another*. I had rather be the most easy, tame, and resigned Believer in the most Gross and imposing Church in the World (I mean that of *Rome*) than one of those Great and Philosophical Minds, who stand upon their Terms with God, and study to hold out as long as they can, against the Doctrines of the Gospel, and the Arguments that are brought to prove them.

To that God, who *alone doth wondrous Things*, and is alone able to bring some proud Reasoners to acknowledge, that he *has done* them, be ascribed all Honour, Praise, and Power, now and for ever!

THE
Difficult Passages
OF
SCRIPTURE
VINDICATED

From such OBJECTIONS as are
usually made to them;

AND

Proper DIRECTIONS given, how we are
to use them.

VOL. III.

Q

SECRET
INDICATED

From which Corrections are to
usually made to form
Proper Directions given how we are
to the them

Vol. III

The difficult Passages of Scripture vindicated from such Objections as are usually made to them; and proper Directions given, how we are to use them:

IN THREE
S E R M O N S

Preach'd at the

R O L L S

In the Year 1711.

2 PET. iii. 16.

In which are some things hard to be Understood, which they that are Unlearned and Unstable, wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own Destruction.

ST. Peter, in this Chapter, employs SERM.
his Pen, in fortifying the Minds of IX
those Christians, to whom he writes, 
Q 2 against

S E R M. against that Scorn and Mockery they

IX. met with from some Profane Men, who

disputed the Certainty of this World's

Dissolution, and of *Christ's* coming

to Judgment; and derided the Eager

Expectations of the first Believers con-

cerning it. *Where*, said they, *is the*

Promise of his Coming? for, *since the*

Fathers fell asleep, all things continue,

as they were from the Beginning of the

Creation. Against the Attempts of these

Scoffers the Apostle arms them through-

out this whole Chapter; assures them

of the Reality of their Hopes, and of

the Truth of the Divine Promises; and

exhorts them to wait with Patience

and Humility for their Accomplish-

ment. *The Lord*, saith he, *is not slack*

concerning his Promise (as some Men

count Slackness) but is *Long-suffering*

to us-ward, not willing that any should

perish, but that all should come to Re-

pentance.

Where he intimates the True Reason

of *Christ's* delaying his Coming, to be,

that he may give Room and Space to

all

all Men every where to repent, and embrace his Gospel. *Wherefore, beloved,* says he a little afterwards, *account that the Long-suffering of our Lord is Salvation; even as our beloved Brother Paul also, according to the Wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you: As also in all his Epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable, wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, to their own Destruction.*

S E R M.
IX.
Ver. 14.
&c.

He seems purposely to have made mention of St. Paul in this Place, not only because he concurred with him in his Testimony concerning the End and Design of God's Long-sufferance, but because his Writings also had been objected against by those very Scoffers, as *obscure and unintelligible*. And therefore he took an Occasion of mentioning one Passage out of them, that he might have an Opportunity of Vindicating the Whole from these Mens scornful Exceptions. *Account,* says he, *that the Long-*

SERM. *suffering of the Lord is Salvation ; even*

IX. *as our beloved Brother Paul also, according to the Wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you. The Place of St. Paul referred to, seems to be that in the Epistle to the Romans, Chap. ii. v. 4. Despisest thou the Riches of his Goodness, and Forbearance, and Long-suffering ; not knowing that the Goodness of God leadeth thee to Repentance ? From which Parallel Text thus produced from St. Paul, he takes Occasion to speak of All his Writings, and of the Imputation which in general lay upon them. As also in All his Epistles (continues he) speaking in them of these things ; in which (i. e.) in which Epistles [I explain it so, notwithstanding a Criticism taken from the Greek, which would make the Words, in which, belong to the Things spoken of in the Epistles, and not to the Epistles themselves, which Criticism I shall not now trouble you with] I say therefore, in which Epistles, are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable (that are Unlearned, i. e. Unskilled,*

Unskilled, and Unversed in Divine SERM.
things; and *Unstable*, i. e. of Light, de- IX.
fultory, unbalanced Minds) *wrest as they* ~~~~~
do the other Scriptures, to their own De-
struction.

Having thus cleared the Connection of
the Text, I shall discourse on it after
the following Manner.

First, By enlarging a little on the Pro- I.
position itself, which it contains: That
there *are* in *St. Paul's Writings*, and in
the *other Scriptures* also, *Things hard to*
be understood.

Secondly, By giving some Account II.
how, and for *what* Reason it has come
to pass, that the *Scriptures are*, and
must be, in some measure *Obscure*: How
necessary and *unavoidable* it was, that
there should be *some* Passages in them
dark and *difficult* even to *Those*, who
lived at the Time when they were writ-
ten, and yet more so to *Us*, who live at
this *Distance* from the Age of the Apo-
stles.

Q 4

Thirdly,

SERM.

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~ Thirdly, By shewing you, that this carries no Reflection at all in it upon the Divine Goodness or Wisdom. And then in the

IV. Fourth, and last place, By raising some Observations from what has been said, and preventing the Ill Uses that may be made of it.

I. First, this Proposition is evidently laid down in the Text, That there are in St. Paul's Writings, *Things hard to be understood*: And it is plainly intimated, that there are such things in the Other Parts of Holy Writ also; inasmuch as they, who *wrest these* Difficult Passages of St. Paul, are said to *wrest the other Scriptures also*.

It is indeed an undoubted Truth, and what no good *Christian* is, I think, in the least concerned to deny, that the Books, both of the Old and New Testament, are not every where equally clear and intelligible. They have,
like

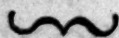
like Other Books, a Mixture of that S E R M.
which is Easy, with that which is Hard IX.
to be understood; a Great Deal that is 
Plain and Obvious, and Somewhat also
that is Obscure and Difficult. Notwith-
standing they were designed to contain
a Revelation of God's Will to Men, yet
was not that Revelation designed to par-
take every where alike of the Nature of
its Great Author and Revealer, who is
(in the Phrase of St. *John*) *Light*, and 1 John i.
in whom there is no Darknefs at all 5.

Sometimes the Things spoken of are
so Mysterious and Sublime, that our
Limited and Weak Apprehensions can
hardly reach them. Sometimes the Man-
ner of speaking, even concerning Com-
mon things is dark and dubious. The
Apocalypse is received into the Canon,
together with the other Parts of Scrip-
ture; the Sense of it has been much
fought and searched after by pious and
inquisitive Men in all Ages of the Church;
and yet we have reason to believe, that
it has never yet been thoroughly under-
stood by any Man

The

S E R M.

IX.



The Beginning of St. *John's* Gospel is so far Intelligible, as that it plainly enough establishes the Divinity of our Lord, and his Co-eternity with God the Father; but yet nobody, I think, will say, that the Sense of every Term in that Chapter is so clear and easy, as that no *Christian*, of whatever Rank or Degree, can, upon perusing, and attentively considering the Whole, miss the Meaning of it.

John iii.

John vi.

Matth.
xxiv.

Even the Discourses of our Blessed Lord are somewhat dark and intricate in some Parts of them. That with *Nicodemus* about Regeneration; and that with the Men of *Capernaum* about Eating his Body and Blood, have in them what will command and exercise our Utmost Attention. And his Account of the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, in St. *Matthew*, is so interwoven with that of the Day of Judgment, that it is very difficult to distinguish exactly, what Expressions belong to the One, and what to the Other.

And

And then, as to St. Paul in particular, his Doctrines of Justification by Faith, and not by Works ; of Election and Reprobation ; his Description of the Struggle between Sin and the Law in the Natural Man, as yet unassisted by Grace ; and his Account of the Spiritual Body, with which we are to rise at the Last Day, are sufficient Instances of the Truth of St. Peter's Assertion, That in him particularly are some Things hard to be understood.

S E R M.

IX.

Gal. ii.

16.

Rom. vii.

1 Cor. xv.

This Truth therefore being supposed, I proceed now, in the

Second Place, to give some Account, how These obscure Passages came to have a Place in Scripture : How it could not otherwise be, but that the Holy Writings should, in some Parts of them, be dark and difficult, even to Those, who lived at the Time when they were written, and yet more so to Us, who live at this Distance from the Age of the Apostles.

II.

And

SERM. And the plain Account of this Matter
IX. is, that, though the Scripture was written by Men under the immediate Inspiration and Guidance of the Holy Ghost, yet were those Men, at the Time of this Inspiration, left to the free Use of their own Natural Faculties and Powers; and to express themselves, every one after their particular Fashion and Manner, the Holy Ghost, though it presided over the Minds and Pens of the Apostles, so far as to preserve them from Error, yet doth not seem to have dictated to them, what they were to say, Word by Word, but in that to have left them, in good Measure, if not altogether to themselves. Which appears plainly from hence, in that we find, the Several Writers of the New Testament always in their several Proper and Peculiar Characters; and as different in their Styles, almost, as One Human Author is from another.

For what is left to Men to express, placed only under an Over-ruling Power, which necessitates them to speak nothing

thing but Truth, must needs be expressed, though always Truly, yet, after the unequal, imperfect Manner of Men, sometimes more darkly, and sometimes more clearly. I say therefore, that the Apostles, and Evangelists, making use of their Natural Faculties and Ways of Speech, in committing to Writing the Truths delivered to them, it could not be expected, that they should speak always with the same Degree of Perspicuity, because no other Writer does so.

Further, The Nature of some Things they delivered was such, so high and heavenly, so obscure and altogether unknown to Men, that the Language of Men could not but fail under them, when they were to express them. They were of Necessity sometimes to fall short, in what they said, of what they Imagined and Conceived; and, for want of fit and adequate Terms to clothe their Thoughts in unequal and improper ones. Particularly as to *St. Paul*, who had been in
the

SERM. the Third Heaven, and there heard
 IX. things unutterable ; was it to be expected, that, when he came down from thence, he should have spoke of those Mysteries, after a clear and satisfactory Manner ? No, those, to whom he spake, must have been in the Third Heaven too, thoroughly to have understood his Meaning.

It is no Wonder therefore, that there should be Passages in Scripture of a doubtful and uncertain Meaning, even to *Those*, who lived at the Time *when* that Scripture was penned. It is yet less a Wonder, that there should be many more such with regard to *Us*, who live at this *Distance* from the Age of the Apostles.

For consider we with ourselves, what manner of Men the Apostles were, in their Birth and Education ; what Country they lived in ; what Language they wrote in ; and we shall find it rather Wonderful, that there are so *few*, than that there are so many Things, that we are at a Loss to Understand. They were
 Men

Men all (except *St. Paul*) meanly born SERM.
and bred, and uninstructed utterly in IX.
the Arts of Speaking and Writing. All
the Language they were Masters of was
purely what was Necessary to express
themselves upon the Common Affairs
of Life, and in Matters of Intercourse
with Men of their own Rank and Pro-
fession. When they came therefore to
talk of the Great Doctrines of the Cross,
to preach up the Astonishing Truths of
the Gospel, they brought to be sure their
Old Idiotisms, and Plainness of Speech
along with them. And is it strange
then, that the deep Things of God
should not always be expressed by them
in Words of the greatest Propriety and
Clearness.

The *Eastern* Manner of Thinking
and Speaking, at that time especially,
when the Scripture was wrote, was
widely different from *Ours*, who live in
This Age, and This Quarter of the World.
The Language of the *East* speaks of
nothing simply, but in the boldest, and
most lofty Figures, and in the longest
and

S E R M. and most strained Allegories. Its Tran-

IX. sitions from One thing to Another are

Irregular and Sudden, without the least Notice given. Its Manner of expressing things is wonderfully short and comprehensive, so as to leave much more to be understood, that is plainly and directly spoken. And this also cannot but contribute to make the Holy Writings seem, in some Parts of them, Obscure to such as are used to throw their Thoughts and their Words into a quite different Mold.

Beyond all this, We, at this Distance, cannot be exactly acquainted with the Occasions, upon which some Parts of Scripture were written ; which nevertheless are the true and proper Keys that open the Meaning of them. We see not the frequent Allusions to Customs then known, and in use. We are in the dark to many of the Objections made to the Apostles Doctrine, which are tacitly obviated and answered by them in their Epistles, without being mentioned. Under these, and many

ny other Disadvantages, the Holy Scri- SER M.
ptures must needs lie, with regard to the IX.
Obviousness of their Sense and Mean-
ing, to Us at this Distance: And it can
be no Blemish to them therefore, if that
Meaning be not always obvious.

I might with Truth, add one thing
more upon this Head, That, where the
Interpretation of Scripture has any Dif-
ficulty, that Difficulty is often, in good
measure, owing to the preposterous En-
deavours used by some Men to explain
and clear it. The Multiplicity of Com-
ments written upon Scripture, and the
Variety of all the *Possible* Senses of any
Text, started by those Writers, have
been so far from reaching the End aim-
ed at, the Dissipating all Doubts and
Difficulties, that they have cast a Mist
over many Places, which of themselves
were plain and clear; and have rendered
some, that were really a little Obscure,
yet more unintelligible.

Numberless Volumes have been writ-
ten on Scripture, in every Age almost,
since it was published; and still the Later

SERM. Writers have generally striven to distinguish themselves from the Elder, by
IX. some New Guess, by saying somewhat that hath not been said before. And thus the Mind of an honest Enquirer is perplexed and confounded, and, in the Midst of a Thousand *false* Meanings, easily loses Sight of the *true* one.

But still it will be said, that these are only *Rational* Accounts, *how* Scripture comes in *some* Places to be Obscure, not at all *Justifications* of its *being* so. God, who inspired the Apostles to write the Holy Scripture, might, if he had pleased, have suggested to them the very Words also, in which it was to be written; and, by that Means, have made it *All* clear and easy, and took away all Occasion of Doubts, and Disputes concerning it. And since he could have done so, why was it not done, if so be Scripture were designed for a Rule of Faith and Manners? For can a Rule be too certain? Can a Man know too plainly what he is to Do, and what he is to Believe?

In

In Answer to this therefore, I shall shew, as I propos'd in the

SERM.

IX.



Third Place, That it carries no Reflection upon the Divine *Goodness*, or *Wisdom*, that the Scripture is not in every Part *as* plain and clear, as it was *possible* to have been made. III.

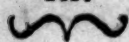
For *First*, The *Goodness* of God is by no means oblig'd to do every thing for us that is *possible* to be done, but only that which is *fitting* and *sufficient*, in order to the *End* it designs. Now the *End* propos'd by God, in causing the Scripture to be written, is, to afford us a Compleat Rule and Measure of whatever is to be believed, or done by us. If therefore, in all Points of Faith and Practice, Scripture is *sufficiently* plain and clear, it is *as* plain and clear as it *need* to be; and it can be no Reflection on the Divine *Goodness*, not to have made it plainer.

But now, that whatever is requisite to be believed, or done by us, is *sufficiently*

R 2

Evident

SERM. Evident in Scripture, will appear from
IX. these Two Considerations.



I. The Darknes of Scripture in some particular Places does not hinder its being generally plain and clear. Its having some things in it *hard to be understood*, implies, that it has *but* some; and that *most* things in it are easy to be understood, lie open and level to the meanest Understandings. The Truth is, whatever Difficulties there are in Scripture, they are few and little, in comparison of what is plain and intelligible there. Take it altogether, and it well deserves the Character Holy *David* bestows on it. That it is a *Lantern unto his Feet and a Light unto his Paths*: That the *Testimony of the Lord is sure, and giveth Wisdom unto the Simple*: That the *Commandment of the Lord is pure, and giveth Light unto the Eyes*. And if in general, and for the most part, Scripture be perspicuous and clear, we have Reason to think there is *enough* of it clear, to instruct us in the *Whole* of our Duty; and make us sufficiently *Wise unto Salvation*. Especially since, in the

2^d Place,

Pf. cxix.
105.
Ver. 130.

Psal. xix.
8.

2^d Place, Nothing there, that is *hard* to be *understood*, is *necessary* to be *understood* by us: And therefore, whatever Truth is contained in any obscure Place of Scripture, we may satisfy ourselves, that the Knowledge, or Practice of it shall never be required at our Hands, upon the Account of its being contained there.

S E R M.

IX.

I say, upon the Account of its being contained there: For a necessary Doctrine, that is delivered obscurely in *one* Place, may *yet* be Revealed clearly in *another*. And wherever it is clearly Revealed, we are obliged to take Notice of it. But whatever Doctrine is contained in *one* or *more* obscure Texts of Scripture, and no where else clearly expressed, is not necessary to be embraced and believed by us; nor shall we be Condemned for not receiving it.

The *Goodness* of God is sufficiently justified, in proposing the Scripture as a Rule of Faith to us: For though it be not equally perspicuous and clear throughout, yet it is in the main, and

SERM. for the most part so; and wherever it is

IX. hard to be understood, it is on that very Account *not necessary* to be understood. But

Secondly, Neither is there any Reflection by this Means cast on the *Wisdom* of God. For though it may be said, if these hard Places are not capable of being understood, why were they written? why were they made Parts of the Revelation of God's Will to Men, if we are still as much in the Dark to them, as if they had never been Revealed? yet, to this it may, in the

First place, be answered, that there is no Part of Scripture so obscure, as to be *utterly* unintelligible. St. Peter says only, there are *some things hard*, but he says not, that there are *any impossible* to be understood. It is difficult indeed in some Places to reach the Sense of the Inspired Writers: But still it is not so difficult, but that it *may* be done, if, with Care and Attention, we study the Holy Scripture; if we free ourselves from Prepossessions and Prejudices; if we

we take in all proper Helps, and make use of all proper Means, and, above all, if we ardently beg of God the Assistance of his Good Spirit, to teach, and enlighten us, and lead us into all Truth. I say, there is no Difficulty so great in Scripture, but that, by the Supernatural Illuminations of God's Spirit, concurring with our Natural Endeavours, it is *possible* to be Mastered; and therefore God did not inspire the Holy Writers, to write any thing altogether in vain, and to no purpose; for nothing written by them is perfectly *incapable* of being understood; only *some* things lie readier to our Sight, upon the Surface as it were of the Text, and *others* lie deeper, and we are forced therefore, (in the Words of Solomon) to *dig for them, as for hidden Treasures*. But, 4.

SERM.

IX.

Prov. ii.

Secondly, The *Wisdom* of God is further justified, in leaving these hard Passages, inasmuch as there are several *Wise Ends*, which it serves by it, and several *Weighty Reasons*, which it has for so doing.

R 4

He

S E R M.

IX.

1 Cor. i.

19.

He left them on purpose to humble the Presumption and Pride of Man, to Confound *the Wisdom of the Wise* of this World, and to give us an Instance of the mighty Power of God, in making those plain Men, the Apostles, utter such great and sublime Truths, as those of the most improved Understandings among the Heathens, by the mere Light of Nature, never did, nor could do.

He left them on purpose to Create an awful Reverence of Mind in us towards Holy truths; which, had they been all Easy of Access, would, in a little time, have grown familiar, and cheap to us also.

To secure the Majesty of Religion therefore, he wrapped up some of the great Mysteries of it in Obscurity.—

Ps. xviii.

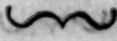
11.

He made (as the Psalmist speaks) Darkness his Secret Place; his Pavilion round about him with dark Water, and thick Clouds to cover him.

Further, He left them also, to Exercise our Industry, and to Engage our Attention. He designed the Holy Book

to

to be such, as that we might make it SERM.
always our Companion and our Study: IX.

That our *Delight* might continually be 
(as *David's* was) *in the Law of the Lord*, Psal. i. 2.
and *in that* we might *meditate Day and*
Night.

In order to which, it was requisite, that the Sense of Every thing, Every where, should not be too plain, and obvious. For how then could we have found always fresh Matter for our Thoughts and Enquiries? No, the Treasure of Divine Knowledge was necessarily *so* to be hid, in these sacred Volumes, as not soon to be exhausted; so as continually to provoke our Searches, and to feed our Mind with ever fresh Discoveries; so as that, how long soever we meditate upon it, we may have still Room left for further Meditations. Were all plain, were all open there, the Mind would quickly droop, and the Attention languish, upon the repeated Views of that, which it was so well acquainted with, and knew so thoroughly.

Again, God mixed together obscure with plain things, deep with common
Truths

SERM. Truths in Scripture, that what was Addressed to *All* might be Adapted to *Every* one's Capacity. The *Babes* in *Christ*, as well as *Grown* Saints, the *Weak* promiscuously, and the *Strong*, were to read the Holy Scriptures, And therefore fit it was, that there should be Food in it proportioned to both; *Milk* for the one, and *strong Meat* for the other.

Yet *further*, These Dark Doctrines and Puzzling Passages were inserted, to be the Test of ingenuous, of sincere and well-disposed Minds; to see, whether, when we were once satisfied that a Book came from God, we would acquiesce in every thing contained in it, and submit ourselves (without Disputes or Cavils) as well to those Parts of it, which *Shocked*, as to those which Enlightened our Minds; or whether we would not (as many have done) lay hold of every obscure Passage to the Prejudice of Scripture, though we had otherwise never so many Arguments for the Divine Original of it; and Reject the Authority of *all* that which is plain and clear

clear there, for the sake of *something* SERM.
which we do not Comprehend. IX.

Finally, God left these Obscurities in Holy Writ, on purpose to give us a *Taste* and *Glympse*, as it were, of those great and glorious Truths, which shall hereafter fully be discovered to us in another World, but which *now are*, in some measure, *hidden from our Eyes*; on purpose to make us earnestly aspire after, and long for that Blessed State and Time, when all Doubts shall be cleared, and the Veil taken off from all Mysteries: When *the Book*, that is now in some measure *shut*, shall be *opened*, and every one of *the seven Seals thereof loosed*: When *that which is perfect shall come*, and *that which is in Part shall be done away*: When we shall exchange Faith for Sight, Hope for Enjoyment, Reasoning for Intuition, and shall not (as we do now) *see through a Glass darkly*, but *know, even as we are known*.

Rev. v. 5.

1 Cor.

xiii. 10.

Ver. 12.

To that blessed State God of his Infinite Mercy bring us all, &c.

SECOND

claim there, for the sake of justice.

18. Which was the Communist?

Kindly, God bless the children in

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and showed it were of these great

and others, which shall here-

after being covered to us in another

Wells, but which were not in force

meeting, which took place on 15th

help to make us carefully elpian after

and long for that blessed time and

and the V-4 taken off from the ship.

When the first of these

[illegible]

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1. The first part of the paper is devoted to the study of the properties of the function $f(x)$ defined by the equation

1. The first step is to identify the problem or question that needs to be answered. This involves understanding the context and the specific requirements of the task.

1911

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1. The first of these is the fact that the

100

THE GREAT GOD OF THE UNIVERSE

SECOND

S E R M O N
SECOND
S E R M O N
ON THE
Same Subject.

SECOND
SERIES
OF THE
SOME SUBJECTS

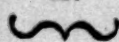
SECOND
S E R M O N
ON THE
Same Subject.

2 PET. iii. 16.

In which are some things hard to be understood, &c.

IN my former Discourse I shewed SERM.
you, that these Words of St. Peter X.
relate directly to the Writings of St. Paul; 
in which he owns, *there are some things hard to be Understood*; and that *They, who were Unlearned, and Unstable, wrested them, as they did the other Scriptures, to their own Destruction.* Whereby he intimates,

S E R M. intimates, that there are also in the *other*

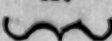
x.  Parts of Scripture, as well as in the Writings of St. Paul, Obscure Passages, liable to be misunderstood, wrested, and perverted by unlearned, and unstable Readers.

I have therefore taken an Occasion from hence, to discourse to you at large concerning the *Difficult* Parts of Holy Writ, so as to take in the *General* Argument; and yet to keep my Eye more particularly all along, upon the Books of the *New Testament*, to which St. Peter's Words chiefly refer.

I proposed to treat of this Subject under the *Four* following Heads.

I. *First*, By enlarging a little on the Proposition, allowed and laid down in the Text, That there *are* in St. Paul's Writings, and in the *other* Scriptures also, *Things hard to be understood*.

II. *Secondly*, By giving some Account *how*, and for *what* Reason it hath come to pass, that the *Scriptures are* and *must*

must be, in some measure *Obscure*: How S E R M.
necessary and *unavoidable* it was, that X.
 there should be *some* Passages in them 
dark and *difficult* even to *Those*, who
 lived at the Time when they were writ-
 ten, and yet more so to *Us*, who live at
 this *Distance* from the Age of the Apo-
 stles.

Thirdly, By shewing you, that this
 carries in it no Reflection, either upon
 the *Goodness*, or *Wisdom* of God: Not
 on his *Goodness*; because though he has
 left *some things* in Holy Writ *hard to*
be understood, yet he has left *enough* there
easy and *plain*; enough to inform us
 clearly of the whole compass of what
 we are *bound* to believe, and to practise,
 Not on his *Wisdom*; because these *dark*
 Parts of Holy Writ have their *Uses*, as
 well as the *clear* ones; there being ma-
 ny *Wise Ends*, and *Weighty Reasons* for
 inserting them; several of which I reck-
 oned up to you in my last Discourse.

SERM.

X.

Fourthly, and *lastly*, I was to raise some Observations from what hath been said; to prevent the *wrong* Uses that *might*, and to point out the *true* and *only* Use that *ought* to be made of it.

The *Two first* of these Heads have been fully spoken to. The *Third* has been entered upon, and in some measure cleared; and what remains behind of it, will fall into the *Fourth* and *Last* General Head, the enlarging on which shall be the Business of this *present* Discourse.

And the First thing I shall observe, from what has been said on this Subject, shall be, The Folly and Unreasonableness of those Men, who endeavour, from the Obscurity of *some* Parts of Scripture, *entirely* to destroy the *Authority* of it.

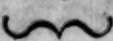
For

For thus they argue: The Bible, say S E R M. they, is a Book ordered by God to be x. written for the Information of Mankind in what they are to Believe and to Do. And can we think that such a Book, from such an Author, should have any Defects in it? Can it be imagined, that God would speak to Man, and yet not speak so as in every Case to be understood by him? Is he either not able, or not willing to express himself clearly? If neither of these can be supposed without Blasphemy, how comes it to pass that this Volume is so full of Difficulties and Mysteries? that this Revelation of his Will wants a yet further Revelation, to give us a plain Account of its Meaning?

Thus do the *Ungodly Reason with themselves, but not aright*; as will appear from these following Considerations. Wisd. ii. 1.

It is a strange Sort of Argument, surely, that a Book, which comes from God, must have nothing in it *Obscure*, and *Hard to be Understood*. On the contrary, I think, it were much to be

S E R M. suspected, that *such* a Book as this was
 X. *not* of Divine Authority, if it *should* be
 found to lie ready and open to the
 most ordinary Apprehensions, in *Every*
 Part and Passage of it. It is given to
 us, on purpose to open to us some Dis-
 coveries concerning the Divine Nature,
 its Essence, and ineffable Perfections;
 to inform us of mysterious Truths,
 the Secrets of Heaven, hid from Na-
 tural Reason, and from former Ages.
 And can a Book, do we think, that
 speaks of these Deep Things of God,
 with which the Natural Man is utterly
 unacquainted, speaks so, as not to give
 us the least Trouble in understanding
 1 Cor. ii. it? Can that, like which *our Eyes never*
 9. *saw, nor our Ears heard, nor hath it en-*
tered into the Heart to conceive any
 thing before, be told us in Words as
 easy to be apprehended, as those, by
 which we express the most Common
 things, that we every Day converse
 with? It is not so when we first set
 ourselves to learn any Human Art or
 Science. The Terms, the Principles,
 the

the Propositions of it are all at first SERM.
Sight strange and uncouth, and make X.
no bright Impression upon the Mind. 
They Amaze, they Puzzle, but they
do not Enlighten us; till by repeated
Views, we have made them familiar and
easy to us. And why then should we
expect, that Divine Mysteries, and the
Things of another World should more
easily be taught and learnt, than Human
Arts and Sciences? The Obscurity of
the Subject, whatever it be, must needs
cause a proportionable Obscurity in the
Expression of it; and no Wonder then,
if Scripture be dark in some Places,
where it speaks of things so remote
from Human Knowledge and Appre-
hension.

Dark it must needs be, unless God,
who miraculously enlightened the Minds
of the Prophets and Apostles, when
they were to write it, should miracu-
lously also open the Understanding of
every one that comes to read it. So
that the Difficulties occurring in some
Passages of a Divine Revelation, are so

SERM. far from being an Argument against its
 X. coming from God, that on the contrary,
 it were not reasonable to think it to be
 a Divine Revelation, if there were *nothing* Abstruse and Difficult in it.

Should it be further objected, that the Design of Scripture is, to Reveal God's Nature and Will to Mankind, to be a sure Guide, and an easy Rule of our Belief and Practice; and it ought therefore in order to the Attainment of this End, to be in every respect plain and clear; for to no purpose would it be given us by God as a Guide and a Rule, if it be Obscurely and Doubtfully expressed:

To this the Answer is ready: That the Scripture, being intended by God, as a Rule of Faith and Manners, must needs be, and certainly is, *so far* clear, as to reach the *End* it is intended for; so far, as to enlighten our Minds in all necessary saving Truths, and to afford us in plain intelligible Terms all that Knowledge, that is requisite to carry us to Heaven. And *thus* far we affirm the
 Scripture

Scripture to be clear and easy. But it follows not, that it ought, on this Account, to be plain and clear in every Part and Passage of it. If there be enough in it easy to be apprehended, it sufficiently answers the End, for which it was designed, though there be some things in it, which are *not* so. And therefore the Objection fails in this, That it supposes Scripture to be written perfectly for *this* End, and for *no* other, the affording us an easy, familiar Rule of Faith and Manners. This indeed was the *chief*, but it was not the *only* End, proposed in writing it.

Besides this, it was intended (as you have heard) *so* to be written, as to humble the Pride of Men, and confound *the Wisdom of the Wise*: so as to try our Probity, and to exercise our strictest Attention, and to employ our Industry; so as to create a Reverence and Awe in us of the Divine Revealer; and to give us an Instance of the mighty Power of God, in making those plain Men, the Apostles, utter such great and sublime

S E R M. Truths, as those of the most improved

X. Understandings among the Heathen, by
the mere Light of Nature, never did,
nor could do. In a word, so as to give
us a light Taste and Glympse only of
those Truths, that were fully to be Re-
vealed to us in another World; and,
by that Means, to make us the more
earnestly reach out our Thoughts to, a-
spire after, and long for the future and
full Enjoyment of them. And, in or-
der to attain these Ends, it was fit and
requisite, that *some* Parts of it should be
involved in Obscurity; as I discoursed
to you the last Opportunity. And
therefore it must not be argued, that
the written Word of God, being de-
signed for a Rule of Faith and Action,
must be perspicuous *throughout*; because
there were *Other* Ends besides this, *to*
which some Parts of it were designed;
and to the attaining which, the Dark
and Difficult Places in Holy Writ con-
tribute as much, as the plain and most
intelligible Passages do, towards build-
ing

ing us up in those Doctrines that are necessary to Salvation. S E R M.
X.

But then it is further Objected, That this Way of accounting for the Obscurity of Holy Writ in *some* things, supposeth it to be Evident in *all* things necessary to Salvation: A Supposition which will not easily be granted by those we have to deal with. For, say they, are not the Doctrines of the Divinity of *Christ*, and the Holy Ghost, and those of the same Rank with these, necessary to Salvation? And yet they are not plainly and clearly contained in Scripture; for then reasonable Men, upon reading Scripture could not have *doubted*, whether they were contained there, or not; much less in good Earnest *believed*, that they were not contained there.

Now the true Account of this Matter is this.

First, It is not pretended, that these Doctrines are plainly contained in *every* Text of Scripture, which speaks of them; but only that in *some one* Text

or

SERM. or *more* they are proposed to us convincingly, and clearly; and if a Truth *be once* delivered so clearly, as to leave no doubt, 'tis the same thing to us, who acknowledge the Divine Authority of all Parts of Scripture, as if it were *many* times there repeated. For Example, were there *no* other Text for the Proof of the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity, in the Sense, in which the Church of God hath always professed to believe it, but *that* only where our Saviour commands his Disciples to *Baptize in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost*: Or that where St. John *speaks of the Three Witnesses in Heaven*; either of these Texts would be sufficient to make that Doctrine an *Evident* Part of Scripture, though in all the *other* Passages usually produced for it, it should be allowed to be expressed obscurely.

Matth.
xxviii. 19.

1 John v.
7.

Again, neither is it pretended, that these Doctrines are any where throughout the whole Bible, expressed with the *utmost* Degree of Evidence and Clearness, which Words are any ways possibly

sibly capable of: But only that they are SERM.
so expressed, that an honest impartial X.
 Mind cannot *well* miss the Sense of them. 

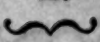
It might have been said indeed, in so many Words, that *Christ*, and the Holy Spirit were, from all Eternity, distinct from the Father, and, together with him, one God blessed for Ever; and equally the Objects of our Religious Worship and Service. But though this be not said there in so many Terms, it is said however in such, as an unbiassed well-meaning Man cannot mistake; and he that is not so, though it should have been said in these very Terms, would perhaps have found a Way to have mistaken, or rather wilfully to have perverted the Sense of them.

The Truth is, God never designed to give us an Account of the Mysteries of Christianity in Expressions every way so bright and clear, as should prevent all possible Wrestings and Misconstructions. For this had been to do too great Force to our Assent, which ought to be free and voluntary. This had been to rob

S E R M. us of the Rewards due to Believing, and
X. to take away the proper Test and Trial
~~~~~ of Sincere and Ingenuous Minds,

Besides, had all Points of Doctrine been delivered with such a Degree of Exactness, been so minutely explained, so strictly and cautiously guarded on all Sides, as to shut out the Possibility of any mistaken Meaning, the Bible had been too Voluminous, and too subtle a Book for common Use. And though to some few distinguishing Heads, it might have given better Satisfaction, yet to the most, that is, to the Unlettered part of Mankind, it would have been ten times more Obscure, and Unintelligible, than even now it is represented to be. So that upon the whole, it was extreamly fit and proper, that these Doctrines should be delivered with that Degree of Clearness, as to be *easily* understood; not so, as to be perfectly *incapable* of being misunderstood. It was requisite, that they should be asserted shortly and plainly, not that they should be fenced about with all those nice Distinctions, which



which could any way guard them from S E R M.  
the Attempts of the most Captious and X.  
Unreasonable. 

And with *this* Degree of Clearness we affirm, that all *necessary* Truths *are* delivered in Scripture, *i. e.* with *such* a Degree of Clearness, as is *necessary*. Nor does it weaken the Strength of this Assertion to say, that the Sense of those Passages in Scripture, which We think plain to this Purpose, is disputed by some, and absolutely denied by others; and therefore is not so plain as we imagine. For at this rate, there would, perhaps, be never a plain Text left in the whole Book of God. Since what Text almost is there, that has not been the Subject of different Interpretations and Opinions?

There is scarce any thing so absurd, says an Ancient, in *Nature* or *Morality*, but some Philosopher or other has held it. And there is scarce any thing so extravagant in *Divinity* (may we say) but that some obstinate, opinionative Man or other has maintained it, and made a wretched

SERM. wretched Shift to countenance his Opinion by the Authority of Scripture, miserably wrested and perverted to his Purpose. But what then? This makes no more against the Perspicuity of the Holy Writings, in all necessary Doctrines, than the Wild Opinion of that Old Philosopher, who affirmed Snow to be black, disproves the Clearness and Certainty of those Informations, which proceed from the Senses.

Let not a Man therefore say, that the Scripture is *not* plain in those things, in which we pretend it *is*, because in those very things the Church of God hath Understood it one way, and *Arius*, *Socinus*, or some such Broacher of Heresy, another. For this proves nothing, but that there have been Men hardy enough to deny somewhat, which all the World before them allowed: but it is by no means an Argument of the Obscurity of Scripture Expression, unless we could know certainly, that these Men were honest and upright in their Searches, acted with no By-designs, had no Vain-End, which

which they proposed to themselves, of heading a Party, or baffling received Opinions; came to search these Books without Biass, Prejudice, or any Preenagements to some Opinions of their own, which they were willing and resolved to find there. Without all this, and a great deal more be proved (which indeed is not capable of Proof) the Scriptures may be clear, though Men of clear Reason in other things do not, or will not understand them.

Well then, the Obscurity of Scripture carries no Objection at all in it, either against the the *Goodness*, or *Wisdom* of God; for in all things *necessary* to be understood, it is obvious and plain; and in what is *unnecessary* to be understood, there are many good and wise Reasons, why it should *not* be plain. In the mean time, let Those, who reject Scripture, be pleased to find us out a System of Religion delivered by God, without any of these Difficulties in it. We desire no more of them, but to leave us in Possession of our Bibles, till they can

SERM.  
X.  
~



S E R M. can shew us a clearer Revelation, and more  
 X. worthy of the Divine Revealer.

~~~~~ If to this they shall say (as many in our Own Times do say) What need of any Revelation at all? *Reason* is clear, and by *that* we may guide Ourselves; God has implanted a *Light* in every one, *sufficient* to shew him the Way to Heaven: We must ask them, Whether *Natural Religion* speaks so plainly in any *one* Point of Religion, but that *some* perverse Man or other has contradicted it? And then, by their own Rule concerning the Obscurity of Scripture, *that* Point is not plain from Reason, because Rational Thinking Men have denied its Plainness; so that a Man, who, on the Account of the Obscurity of Holy Writ, shall pretend to reject the *Christian Religion*, and turn *Deist*, must, upon the same Account, reject *Deism* too, and turn *Atheist*. For there are a great many Things in the Notion of a God, and of that Worship, which *Natural Religion* directs us to pay him, that he can never satisfy himself about, nor thoroughly under-

understand. Nay, he must not stay at SERM.
Atheism neither, for the very same Reason X.
 ; since no System of *that* kind can
 be contrived, which is not in many
 Parts of it obscure, and unintelligible.
 A great Instance of which we have in
 the Writings of that Modern *Atheist*,
SPINOSA. In a Word, he must *be* no-
 thing, *believe* nothing, be of no Opini-
 on, but live under an *Indifference* to all
 Truths and Falshoods, in a pendulous
 State of Mind ; *necessitated* to act conti-
 nually in order to some End *supposed* to
 be true, and yet *doubting*, whether there
 be any such thing as *Truth*, or no ; liv-
 ing under all the Agonies and Torments
 of a Rooted Scepticism.

Thus have I *considered largely*, and in
 some measure endeavoured to remove
 the *First* Ill Use that is made of the
 Doctrine of the Text, by those Perverse
 and Unreasonable Men, who take an
 Advantage from the Confessed Obscurity
 of some Parts of Scripture, to dispute the
 Authority of it.

SERM. I now hasten to mention some *Other*

X. Ill Uses that are made of what is owned here in the Text, that there are in the Inspired Writings *Things hard to be understood.*

And indeed, after what has been already discoursed; I need do little more than mention them; for to represent them, will be to disprove them.

Secondly, therefore, I observe, That it follows not from thence, as the *Romanists* would infer, that, because of these Obscure Passages in Scripture, there is absolute Need of a supreme Judge in Controversies, who should determine the Sense of every Text, and, among many *false* Meanings of it, infallibly guide us into the only *true* one. I say, it by no means follows from hence, that such a Judge is necessary, for this plain Reason: Because, as we have heard, none of those Points, that are any ways obscure and doubtful, are necessary to be determined. In these every Man may abound in his own Sense, and have his own Opinions to himself; and

and if he does but maintain those Opinions with Sobriety and Modesty, without rending the Unity, or disturbing the Peace of the Church, though he may be under an Error, yet that Error shall not be rigorously imputed to him. SERM.
X.

Much less does it follow from hence,

Thirdly, That because of These Obscurities in Scripture, therefore the Book itself should be taken out of the Peoples Hands. For though there are *some* Things in it *hard* to be Understood, yet *many*, nay *most* Things there are *easy* to be understood, as that very Expression in St. *Peter* intimates. And how unreasonable therefore is it, to make *some* dark Passages in Holy Writ a Pretence of Locking up *all* at once, without Distinction, from the Generality of *Christians*; because there are a *few* things there, which they cannot understand, therefore to let them understand *nothing* at all. And this is so much the harder, because (as we have heard) all that is necessary to be understood, is evidently contained in Scripture. So that

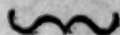
S E R M. to deprive a Man of that which he *can*

X. understand, and which also it is necessary he *should* understand, for the sake of somewhat contained in the same Book, which he *cannot* understand and which it is no matter whether he *doth* understand or no, is an unreasonable Piece of Cruelty.

I will be bold to say, that, upon the same Grounds that the *Roman* Church denies the People the Liberty of Reading Scripture, she might have debarred them also of the Privilege of our Saviour's Conversation, while he lived upon Earth. For there were *several Things* in the Course of his Instructions, *hard to be understood*; and therefore for fear of misinterpreting those Things, it was convenient, might she have said, that all Ignorant, Unskilful Men should utterly abstain from his Company. But our Saviour did not deter the *Common* People from approaching him, because now and then he spake a *dark* Parable. And therefore neither ought they to be withheld from reading his Gospel, though
there

there be some hard things there, which perhaps they will read without understanding.

S E R M.
X.



But *Fourthly*, and *lastly*, These Ill Uses of the Doctrine of the Text being removed, the Truest, and most Proper Use we can make of it, is, from a Sense of these *things hard to be understood* in Scripture, to form ourselves into a deep Humility, and Lowliness of Mind, in the perusing them; to read that Sacred Volume, with a Wise Jealousy, and a Wary Distrust of our own selves; not with a Conceited Opinion of our own Gifts and Parts, as if *we* alone were able to fathom all Depths, and to grasp all Mysteries. Except ye *receive my Gospel as a little Child*, said our Saviour, *Ye cannot enter into the* Mark. x
Kingdom of Heaven. And except ye ¹⁵ read my Gospel, as a little Child, may he be as well supposed to say, with such an humble, and teachable Temper, with such a Freedom from Vanity, Prepossession, and Prejudices, as belongs to that Infant State, ye cannot enter in-

SERM. to the deep things of it; those things
 X. which are expressly said to be *revealed*
 Matth. xi. *to Babes, but hidden from the Wise.*

25.

Let us therefore weigh and consider what we read as well as we can; but let us not too much indulge our private Reasonings upon, and fanciful Expositions of Scripture. When we stick any where let us modestly consult those who should know better than we, and whose particular Business it is to understand and explain this sacred Volume. Let us enquire what has been the Interpretation generally received in the Church of *Christ* in the Purest Ages of it. Or, if that be hard to come at, what is the Opinion of our *own* Church, that particular Member of the Mystical Body of *Christ*, into which it has pleased the Divine Providence to engraft us. When we have found it, let us resolve not lightly to vary from it; not without strong Reasons, and clear Convictions to the contrary; and even then to do it with Modesty, and be content to enjoy our own Private Opinions, without

without endeavouring to make Prose-SERM.
lytes, or troubling the Peace of the x.
Church, for the sake of them. Let us 
pay a due Deference, though not a blind
Obedience, to so great an Authority.
And let us not reverence Her *Decisions*
only, but make use of Her Admirable
Words also, which she puts into the
Mouth of every One, who desires to
grow in the Knowledge of Scripture.

*Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy
Scripture to be written for our Learning,
Grant, that we may in such wise hear
them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly
digest them, that by Patience and Comfort
of thy Holy Word, we may Embrace, and
ever hold fast, the blessed Hope of Ever-
lasting Life, which thou hast given us
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

THIRD
S E R M O N
ON THE
Same Subject.

THIRD
SERMON
ON THE
Same Subject.

THIRD
S E R M O N
ON THE
Same Subject.

2 PET. iii. 16.

*Which they that are Unlearned, and Un-
stable, wrest, as they do also the other
Scriptures, unto their own Destruction.*

FROM the former Part of the Verse S E R M.
I have already taken Occasion to XI.
Discourse to you largely concerning the
Obscurity of Holy Writ. In the latter
Part of it, which I have proposed now
to handle, St. Peter gives us an Account
of the Ill Impressions that these Difficult
Parts

SERM. Parts of Scripture make often on the
 XI. Minds of Weak *Christians*; they are
 ~~~~~ wrested by them (he tells us) to *their own*  
*Destruction.*

By *Unlearned Men*, the Apostle means not such as wanted that which we commonly call *Learning*, but such as were not well skilled in *Divine Things*. By *Unstable*, such as, not being well grounded in the Faith, were, upon that Account, easy to be drawn aside into pernicious Opinions and Destructive Errors. Such, he says, as These, *wrest*, i. e. misunderstand, misapply, and pervert the Writings of St. Paul, and the other Scriptures: And This They do, to *their own Destruction*: That is, to their Eternal Ruin in another World. So that the Meaning of this whole Passage is, That some Men, not being firmly rooted and grounded in the true Faith of *Christ*, and being by Consequence of an Uncertain and Wavering Judgment in Matters of Religion, were apt to make an Ill Use of the Difficult Places of Scripture, and to turn them to such a Sense

Sense as destroyed Christianity ; and such S E R M.  
therefore as could not but end in the De- XI.  
struction of Those who asserted and main-   
tained it.

This at first Sight perhaps may seem an *hard Saying*. What ! will some Men say, shall a Man be ruined Eternally for a misunderstood Place of Scripture ? Shall They who own the Divine Authority of Holy Writ (as 'tis plain these Persons did) and who are studious to know and Embrace the true Sense of it every where, if in some Obscure Passages they should mistake it, be answerable for that Mistake, at the Hazard of their Salvation ?

Better, at this rate, had it been, that the Bible should never have been given Men, if it be so very fatal a thing to make a Wrong Exposition, even of the most Doubtful and Intricate Parts of it.

I shall endeavour to give an Answer to this Complaint, by stating the Just Bounds, and shewing the Great Reasonableness of St. *Peter's* Assertion ; and shall then make use of the Truth of the  
Text,

SERM. Text, thus *Explained* and *Justified*, in  
 XI. some *Observations* and *Inferences*, that it  
 will afford us.

In order to state the Bounds of the Assertion, it will be fit to consider, more particularly,

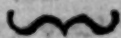
- I. *First*. What is strictly to be *Understood* here by *Wresting* of Scripture.
- II. *Secondly*, What *kind* of Passages in Scripture they were, that are said to have been thus *wrested*.
- I. As to the *First* of these, it must be considered, That, to *Wrest* Scripture, doth in Strictness of Speech signify, not only to misinterpret, and misunderstand it, out of Weakness and Ignorance, as any *Christian* may blamelessly do, but with some Degree of Perversity and Wilfulness to force an Unnatural and false Construction upon it, in order to make it fall in with our Corrupt Opinions and Prejudices, which we have before-hand entertained, and resolved not  
to



to part with. Thus much is intimated by the Original Word *σρεβλᾶν*, which signifies, either to detort or turn away, or to torment, and put to the Question. In the *First* of these Senses, when applied to Scripture, it implies, that these *Wresters* of it Bent and Warped the streight Line and Measure of their Duty, on purpose to make it suit with their own Crooked Opinions. In the *Second*, (which comes to much the same) that They did as it were Torment and Vex it, till it spake according to their Minds.

SERM.

XI.



*Secondly*, We are to observe, what kind of Passages in Scripture they were, which these Men are said to have *Wrested*. They were such as were *hard to be understood* (so the preceding Words speak) and such as, for that very reason, there was no Necessity that they *should* Understand, and yet these Men would pretend to Understand them, and to be very positive also, and peremptory in their Opinions concerning them. Further it appears, that these Places treated not of slight Indifferent Points of Doctrine,

II.

SERM. Doctrine, but of such as were of the  
 XI. utmost Concern and Moment; such as  
 were the Foundations of the *Christian*  
 Faith, and the very Pillars that support-  
 ed the whole Frame of Religion. I  
 say, it appears, that they treated of such  
 Points as these, from the foregoing Parts  
 of this Chapter, where St. *Peter* dis-  
 courses of the Day of Judgment, of  
 its Certainty, and of the Wise Reasons  
 for which God was pleased to delay it;  
 and represents some Men as *Scoffing* at  
 Ver. 4. these Doctrines, and saying, *Where is*  
*the Promise of his Coming? For since the*  
*Fathers fell asleep, all things continue as*  
*they were.* To convince these Scoffers  
 he urges the Authority of St. *Paul* to  
 them; who in his Epistles had maintain-  
 ed the same Assertions, not always how-  
 ever expressed with such a Degree of  
 Evidence and Clearness, as might be  
 thought necessary to prevent all Mistakes  
 from whence Ill Men had taken an Oc-  
 casion to abuse his Words to a quite dif-  
 ferent Sense, and to pervert his Mean-  
 ing. So that the Points of Doctrine, to  
 which

which these Wrested Texts referred, S E R M.  
were Great and Fundamental ones ; and XI.  
which it was of the last Importance to   
be rightly instructed in. And to this  
we may add also a

*Third Remark,* That this forced Interpretation of Obscure Passages was in Opposition to other Plain and Evident Texts. For since (as I have already Discoursed to you) there is no Point of Moment, but what is some where or other plainly and perspicuously delivered in Scripture, and since these Wrested Places of Scripture, which St. *Peter* speaks of, related, as you have heard, to Points of Moment ; it follows, that they who Wrested them, did it in Contradiction to other Plain and Perspicuous Parts of Holy Writ.

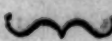
The full Import of the Text therefore, under these several Explications, will be, that They who, being misled by Pride, and Vanity, or any other Lust and Passion, perverted the Sense of Scripture, in order to make it suit with their own wicked Practices, or justify



SERM. their ill Opinions ; who Vexed and Tortured Texts, in order to make them speak such Language as was for their Purpose ; who did this in Passages very *hard to be understood*, and therefore not *necessary* to be understood, and in Points of Doctrine which were of the utmost Concern and Importance, and Interpreted these Passages, in relation to these Points, quite contrary to other plain and express Places of Scripture ; these Men, I say, are very justly and reasonably said, *to have wrested the Scriptures to their own Destruction*. For surely there was such a Complication of Insincerity, Pride, and Obstinacy in this *Manner* of wresting Scripture, as deserved such a Condemnation.

And therefore to that Question, Shall a Man be Eternally ruined for a misunderstood Place of Scripture ? We answer, yes doubtless, under those Circumstances which we have before Explained, if it be a *Fundamental* Point, about which he is mistaken, and be much his *own Fault*, that he is mistaken.

A mis-

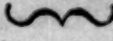
A misunderstood Place of Scripture SERM.  
 may overthrow One of the Prime Arti- XI.  
 cles of Faith, which God has made ne-   
 cessary to be believed in order to Salva-  
 tion : Or it may destroy the Morality of  
 the Gospel, by introducing a Loose Opi-  
 nion concerning Life and Manners. By  
 wresting *One* single Passage of Holy  
 Writ, a Man may either *deny the Lord*  
*who brought him,* or *turn the Grace of* <sup>2</sup> Pet. ii.  
*God into Lasciviousness.* And he that Jude 4.  
 does either of these, cannot be said to be  
 severely dealt with, though he be cut  
 off from the Mercies of the Gospel.  
 For a Life led in Opposition to the Plain  
*Practical* Rules of Christianity, or with-  
 out that *Faith*, which Christianity re-  
 quires, are *either* of them a sufficient  
*Cause* of our Condemnation. And  
 therefore such a Wilful Wrestling of Scrip-  
 ture, as occasions either of these, must  
 in its Consequence be Damnable, and  
 excuse God in pronouncing this Sen-  
 tence, from all manner of Severity or  
 Rigour in his Dealings with us. This  
 is the Account of the true Meaning of

SERM. St. *Peter's* Assertion in the Text, and of  
 XI. the Justness also, and Reasonableness of  
 it. Which Points being thus Stated and  
 Cleared, I come now, as I proposed, to  
 make use of them, in some *Observations*  
 and *Inferences* that they afford us. And

*First*, It may be Observed, that the  
 Scriptures were perverted, and turned  
 by Ill Men to Ill Purposes, in the *Times*  
 of the Apostles themselves; that they  
 were no *sooner* Written, but they were  
*Wrested*. From whence we may learn  
 these Two Things.

*Ist*, That if this happened in the *Apo-*  
*stles* Days, then well might it happen in  
*After-times*; especially in *this* Age, which  
 is at so great a Distance from the Time  
 of the Apostles Writing. We may cease  
 to wonder, how it has come to pass,  
 that so many Controversies have been  
 started about the Sense of Scripture, that  
 it has been urged to so many wrong and  
 Different Purposes, and brought to sup-  
 port and countenance so many Heretical  
 Opinions in *Latter* Days, when we find  
 that during the *Lives* of St. *Paul* and St.  
*Peter* themselves, it was thus insincerely  
 and

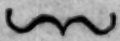


and unfairly dealt with. The Ink was SERM.  
hardly dry, which fell from the Apostles XI.  
Pens, but Men began to dispute about   
the Words that were wrote in it; to  
misconstrue, and misapply them, every  
one to such Doctrines as pleased him  
best; and to draw from the Inspired  
Writings things destructive of Faith and  
Salvation, in the Face of the Inspired  
Authors of them, without asking, or  
at least, without taking their Opinions  
in the Point; who surely had been the  
properest Men to have given an Account  
of their own Meaning. And if these  
things were so *then*, what Wonder is it,  
if ever *since*, and especially *now*, in  
these Dregs of Time, there be Wilful  
Men found, who will oppose their own  
Vain Fancies and Novelties to the Gene-  
ral Sense of the whole Body of *Christi-*  
*ans*, and not submit themselves to such  
a Concurrent Testimony in the Exposi-  
tion of Scripture, as though of the Ut-  
most Moment towards determining our  
Assent, yet falls far short of Infallibility  
and Inspiration.

SERM. From the same Observation also we

XI. may learn, in the

2<sup>d</sup> Place, That an Unerring Expounder of Scripture is not so Useful and Necessary, as some Men would make us believe it is ; because if there were such an One, and he were known and acknowledged to be such by all Men, yet would not that secure all Men from misinterpreting Scripture, as is plain from the Instance of the Text. The Apostles were certainly Unexceptionable Interpreters of their own Writings, and infallible Judges of all Controversies that could arise from them ; and yet notwithstanding this, their Writings were in their own Time perverted, to countenance Erroneous and Heretical Doctrines ; and so doubtless would they be now, though there were an Infallible Judge upon Earth still. And Vain therefore is the Pretence of our Adversaries of the Church of *Rome*, that such an Infallible Judge is necessary, to assure us of the True Sense of Scripture, and put an End to all Controversies concerning

cerning it ; since plain it is, that, when SREM.  
there was such an Infallible Judge, he XI.  
did not put an End to all Controversies   
of this kind : There were still a great  
many Proud, Pertinacious, and Opini-  
onative Men left, that would not be con-  
cluded by him.

Now if the Inferring the Necessity of  
God's acting in such, or such a Manner,  
from the Convenience that would re-  
dound to Mankind from his so acting,  
be no very good Argument in Divinity,  
even when that Convenience is allowed ;  
what a Kind of Argument must that be,  
which would prove the Necessity of an  
Infallible Judge, from the great Expedi-  
ence of it towards Determining all  
Controversies, when even that Expedi-  
ence itself (as we have seen) wants to  
be proved ?

But to go on. We may observe from  
St. *Peter's* Assertion in the Text,

*Secondly*, What Temper of Mind, what  
Precautions, what Degree of Know-  
ledge are requisite, in order to make  
our Enquiries into the Obscure Parts of



S E R M. Scripture Innocent and Useful to us.

XI. It is plain that this is an Attempt of  
some Hazard, and that it may happen to  
cost us dear, as it did those in the Text,  
if we do not fitly prepare and guard  
our Minds against the Danger of it.  
Which may be done, if we manage our  
Searches of this Kind by these follow-  
ing Rules and Directions.

1<sup>st</sup> We must take care that the End  
we propose to ourselves in these Enqui-  
ries be Good and Laudable. They must  
not be Entered upon out of meer Curi-  
osity and Wantonness, not out of a Vain  
and fruitless Desire of Knowledge, nor  
out of a Design of being more Skilful  
and Learned than other Men, and of  
appearing to understand every thing;  
but the End of all our Searches in this  
Case ought to be, that we may improve  
in the Skill of those Divine Truths  
which were on purpose committed to  
Writing, that there might be Matter in  
Holy Writ, fit always to employ our re-  
peated Meditations, and to exercise our  
strictest Attention: That we may by  
such

such Searches gain to ourselves higher and more enlarged Apprehensions of God, a truer and clearer Sense of the deep Wisdom of all his Mysterious Dispensations; and may thus raise up our Minds into greater Degrees of holy Admiration, Reverence, and Awe. S E R M. XI.

We must intend to qualify ourselves by these Searches for there moving the Objections raised by those, who are no Friends to Scripture, for the Justifying the darkest, as well as the brightest Parts of it, and making out to fair unprejudiced Men the beautiful Harmony of all the different, but agreeing Branches of the Divine Revelation.

2<sup>dly</sup>, We must come to this Work, as with a right Intention, so with a Mind rightly disposed and qualified to pursue that Intention; not presuming on our own Strength; not with an high Opinion and Conceit of our particular Gifts, Abilities or Advantages, as if we alone were able to clear up all Difficulties, and to go to the Bottom of all Mysteries, and that nothing were too hard for

us

SERM. us. This is not a Temper of Mind, ei-

XI. ther naturally fitted for such a Work, or

which God delights to bless with super-natural Assistances and Discoveries. No, if ever we hope to make our Enquiries of this Kind successful and profitable to us, we must be sure to conduct them with great Modesty, with a becoming Diffidence and Distrust of ourselves, humbly and chiefly relying upon God for his Gracious Help and Assistance; and in order to it, putting up frequent and fervent Petitions to that good Spirit, which Indited the Holy Scriptures, that he would please to enlighten us with the Knowledge of all the deep Mysteries contained there. 'Tis Humility and Devotion that principally qualify us for such Searches as these; and will do more by themselves towards giving a Man a true understanding of Scripture, than all the Gifts and Parts in the world will do, when separated from them. For it is true in this Instance, as well as in many others, That *God resisteth the Proud, and giveth Grace to the Lowly.*

James. iv.  
6.

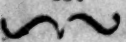
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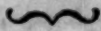
And as a good Way to keep alive and S E R M.  
improve this Humility of Mind in us, XI.  
let us be sure, 

3<sup>dly</sup>, In our Searches of this Kind, e-  
ver to carry this Truth along with us (a  
Truth I have largely explained, and  
proved to you in a former Discourse)  
that there is no Place of Holy Writ *hard*  
to be Understood, that is *needful* to be  
understood by us. If we maintain this  
Reflection constantly upon our Minds,  
it will teach us not to lay too great  
Stress upon these Difficulties, nor to  
employ too much of our Time upon  
them, so as to be in the least taken off  
from considering what is more plain and  
profitable in Scripture, what can more  
easily and usefully be understood, and is  
indeed more necessary to be understood  
by us. Some Men pore so much, and so  
long upon Passages of a disputed Mean-  
ing, as If they thought it indispensably  
requisite to determine themselves of one  
Side or other of the Question; as if the  
Whole of Religion were concerned in  
such difficult Enquiries; they are so bu-  
sy in opening and explaining *hard* Places,  
that

SERM. that they forget to meditate upon *plain*

X.  ones, and to govern their Lives under a lively and vigorous Sense of the Doctrines contained in them: Which is do-

Luke. xi. 42. ing just as the *Pharisees* did, *Tything Mint and Rue, and all Manner of Herbs, and passing over Judgment and the Love of God.* Whereas (as our Saviour in that Case decides) *These ought they to have done, and not to have left the Other undone.* A due Reflection therefore upon this Truth, that the Understanding the Obscure Places of Scripture, is not a thing strictly required of us, or needful for us, will be of use to moderate our too great Eagerness in the Pursuit of such kind of Knowledge; to render us less impatient and uneasy under what we *do not* understand of it, and less positive and dogmatical in what we *do*. And thus the Two greatest Temptations towards perverting Scripture will be removed, an Excessive *Curiosity* in Searches of this Kind, and an Over-weening *Fondness* for our own private Interpretations and Opinions.

4<sup>thly</sup>, If we would not wrest the *hard* S E R M.  
*Places in Scripture*, we must be sure to IX.  
 make that an inviolable Rule and Law   
 to ourselves, never to expound them so  
 as to *oppose Perspicuous and Clear ones*;  
 but so to order our Interpretation of  
 Doubtful Points, as to make them fall  
 in with the clear and intelligible Parts of  
 the same Revelation; so as together with  
 them to make up one Complete Body  
 of Truths, perfectly agreeing with each  
 other.

The best Way of knowing whether  
 a Line be Crooked or not, is to apply  
 it to One that is confessedly straight;  
 and the surest Way of not Erring in  
 Obscure Passages, is to make Plain  
 Texts the Measure and Judge of them.  
 The greatest Part of the Abuses and  
 Misinterpretations of Scripture have a-  
 risen from a contrary Management;  
 from Mens giving obscure Texts a new  
 and particular Sense of their own *first*,  
 and then growing fond of that Inven-  
 tion *afterwards*, and resolving to bring  
 all the plainest Passages in Scripture,  
 whether

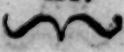


SERM. whether they will or no, to Countenance  
 XI. and Comply with it.

~~~~~ That we may carry ourselves after a quite different manner in our Searches, it is fit for us to observe,

5^{thly}, and *Lastly*, That the safest and securest Way of looking into these *δυσνόητα* of St. Paul, and the other Holy Writers, is, is to postpone the Consideration of them, till we have mastered what is sure and easy in Scripture, till we have rooted and grounded ourselves in those Points of Doctrine that lie obvious and open; and when we have done that, there will be no Danger of looking into any thing else, let it be never so hard, and never so obscure. For either we shall hit upon the right Interpretation of it; or if we do not, the Wrong one shall not hurt us. A Man that holds all that is plainly contained in Scripture, and all that is necessary to be held by him, may in that which is not plain, and not necessary, innocently abound in his own Sense.

For

For though he should in these Matters SE R M.
mistake in his Opinions, and mistake the XI.
Sense of Scripture, upon which he 
grounds those Opinions; yet those Mi-
stakes cannot be fatal, because not fun-
damental. He can never maintain any
thing *Directly repugnant* to the *Catholick*
Faith, and *Evidently destructive* of it;
and while he *does not*, he may maintain
what else he pleases; and so he does it
with Sobriety and Modesty, and a due
Deference to the Opinion of those, who
have a Right to be listened to in these
things, his Error (if it be one) shall ne-
ver prove dangerous, or be imputed to
him. And this Remark is what is plain-
ly suggested to us by the Words of the
Text, where St. *Peter* tells us, that those
which wrested the hard Places in St. *Paul's*
Writings, and the other Scriptures,
were *the Unlearned and Unstable*, that is
(as I told you) those who being not well
grounded in the Faith, were Easy to be
drawn aside into pernicious Opinions
and destructive Errors. From whence
it follows, that the best Way to secure
our-

SERM. ourselves from thus perverting what is
 XI. obscure in Scripture is, *first*, to render
 ~~~~~ ourselves *Learned and Stable* in what is  
 plain; and fixing that as our Center,  
 from whence we are not to be removed,  
 we may extend our Thoughts and Opinions to what Circumference we please. That Faith which we keep *pure and undefiled* in Fundamentals, shall either enable us to find out those Truths of lesser Moment, that perfectly agree with it, or shall excuse us before God, if we should miss of them. There will be a Probability from hence of our Understanding Obscure Texts rightly; or if we do not, yet there will be a Certainty of our not incurring the Guilt of *Wresting Scripture to Our own Destruction*.

Thus have I dispatched the Second general Observation, which I raised from the Text, (*viz.*) to consider from thence. what Temper and Qualifications of Mind, what Precaution and Degrees of Knowledge are requisite, in order to make our Enquiries into the  
 Obscure



Obscure Parts of Holy Writ Innocent SERM.  
and Useful to us. XI.

I might observe also from hence, in the  
3<sup>d</sup> Place, That if Perverting *Obscure*  
Passages of Scripture be a thing in itself  
damnable, as St. *Peter* assures us, it is;  
how much more certainly damnable is  
it to pervert *plain* ones? And then infer,

4<sup>thly</sup>, and *Lastly* also, That if such a  
Sentence be pronounced upon those,  
who *Wrest* Scripture; then surely a much  
higher Degree of Punishment is reserved  
for those, who *Affront* and *Ridicule* it.  
But because the *First* of these Points has  
been already in some measure intimated  
in the preceding Discourse, and there  
occasionally explained; and because the  
*Second* is of too extensive and concerning  
a Nature to be now considered; I shall  
therefore at present insist upon Neither  
of them. They may perhaps employ  
our Reflections on some other Opportu-  
nity.



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A  
DISCOURSE

ON

*Religious Sincerity,*

Wherein the true Marks and Tests  
of it are fully fet forth.

---



DISCOURSE

ON

Religious Society.

Wherein the true Nature and Ends  
of it are fully set forth.

X

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*A Discourse -on Religious Sincerity;  
wherein the true Marks and Tests of  
it are fully set forth:*

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IN A  
S E R M O N

Preached at

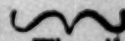
*Hampton Court*

October 15. 1710.

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2 COR. xiii. 5.

*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the  
Faith; prove your own selves.*

**T**HERE are three several Ranks S E R M.  
and Orders of Men, into which XII.  
those that Name the Name of Christ, and   
profess his Religion, may be divided. 2 Tim. ii. 15.

X 3

Some

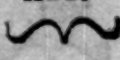
SERM. Some have nothing more than the mere

XII. Name and Profession of Christianity,  
 Ephes. iv. 18. *for in their Works they deny it; being alienated from the Life of Christ,* and

paying no manner of Obedience to his Laws; but living in the Open and Avowed Practice of all Kind of Pollutions. Others there are, who as manifestly adorn the Doctrine they embrace, and live up to the Rule which they profess, so far as Human Infirmary will suffer them. They have, by the Grace of God concurring with their Sincere Endeavours, subdued the Power of their Corrupt Lusts and Affections, so that little or no Disturbance doth from thence arise to them; but they go on in the Paths of Virtue, and the Duties of Piety, evenly and regularly; Glorifying God, and Benefiting Men, and *shining*

Prov. iv. 18. *more and more unto a perfect Day.* And to each of these the State and Condition of their Own Souls is known certainly and clearly. A strong Conviction of Guilt terrifies the one, without any Offer of Excuse, or Hope of Pardon; and the Conscience



Conscience of the Other bears Witness S E R M.  
to their Uprightness, without Doubts, XII.  
or Misgivings. Between these there is   
a Middle State of Men, who are neither  
notoriously Evil, nor yet remarkably  
Virtuous; neither entirely given over to  
work Wickedness, nor yet thoroughly  
confirmed in Goodness; but in a Doubt-  
ful, Uncertain Way of Living, and  
Thinking; sometimes standing firm in  
Virtue, and sometimes failing; some-  
times sinning, and sometimes repenting;  
sometimes hoping, and sometimes de-  
sponding.

To such as these the Exhortation of  
the Apostle in my Text is directed:  
*Examine yourselves, whether you be in the  
Faith; prove your own selves:* That is, Con-  
sider your Condition impartially and  
thoroughly, try it by the Rules of the  
Gospel; satisfy yourselves once for all,  
whether you be true sincere Believers,  
such as God will accept. If you find  
that you *are*, resolve by his Grace to  
*continue* such to your Lives End; if you  
find you *are not*, resolve to make your-

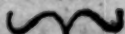
S E R M. selves such, as soon as is possible. For

XII. nothing can be of more Moment to  
 ~~~~~ You, than this Knowledge, and these  
 Resolutions. *Examine yourselves whe-*
ther ye be in the Faith; prove your own
selves.

In order to assist you in this Enquiry, it shall be the Business of my present Discourse to propose some few plain *Marks, or Tests*, by which every Man, who entertains any Doubts of this kind (as very good Men sometimes do) may, if he pleases, Try his own Sincerity, and fully satisfy himself, whether he be an hearty Believer, and a sound Member of that Body, of which *Christ Jesus* is the Head: Whether, and how far he hath obtained the great Christian Perfection, which is to recommend all the rest, I mean, that of *Sincerity*.

- I. And, *First*, The most obvious, and therefore the most satisfying Mark of *Religious Sincerity* is, if a Man, upon a Review of his own Thoughts, finds, that
 his

his Resolutions of Obedience are *Universal* and *Unlimited*; without a Reserve

SERM.
XII.


for any Favourite Sin, without excepting any particular Instance of Duty, wherein he desires to be excused. *Then*

(says the good Psalmist) *shall I not be ashamed*, i. e. *Then* may I safely confide in

my Own Innocence and Uprightness,

when I have Respect unto all thy Com-

mandments; when I find myself equally

determined to Obey every Divine Precept,

and resolved to allow myself in no

Practice whatsoever, which the Law of

God doth not allow of. And where

this is not the Case, there can be no

true Christian Sincerity; which con-

sists in a true Bent and Inclination of

the Will towards God; and the *Will* is

never *Truly*, but when it is *totally* in-

clined towards him; when it is lost, and

swallowed up in the *Divine Will*; im-

plicitly likes or dislikes, chooses or

refuses, what God hath before-hand ap-

proved, or disapproved by his Holy

Precepts, or Prohibitions. Is a Man

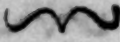
said to be sincere to his Friend, who be-

trays

S E R M. trays him in any One Important Secret,
 XII. committed to his Trust, though he
 ~~~~~ should be faithful in many others? Is a  
 Servant said to be sincere to his Master,  
 who hath any Reserved Cases, wherein  
 he resolves not to consult his Honour,  
 or Interest? No more can a Man be  
 reckoned sincere towards God, who sets  
 up any single Lust, Inclination, or  
 Thought, against what he knows to be  
 the Divine Will and Pleasure. And this  
 is evidently the Reason of that Determi-  
 nation in St. James; *Whosoever shall keep  
 the whole Law, and yet offend in One  
 Point, he is Guilty of All.* For (as it  
 there follows) *he that said, Do not Com-  
 mit Adultery, said also, Do not Kill.*  
*Now, if thou Commit not Adultery, yet  
 if thou Kill, thou art become a Transgres-  
 sor of the Law; i. e. If thou neglect-  
 est to observe any One Divine Com-  
 mand, knowing it to be One, Thou  
 art in that Instance as open, and de-  
 clared a Rebel to the Authority Enact-  
 ing it, as if thou shookest off thy Obe-  
 dience to All.*

James ii.  
 10, 11.

If

If then, upon a Careful Survey of SERM.  
ourselves, we find, that we are, from XII.  
the Bottom of our Souls, disposed, and   
resolved to comply with *All* the Terms  
of Duty (whether Grateful, or Un-  
grateful to Flesh and Blood) which the  
Gospel proposeth to us; that it is our  
fixt Intent not to do, in any Case,  
what God had forbidden, nor to neg-  
lect what he hath enjoined; and that  
there is no Appetite, Desire, or De-  
sign so dear to us, but we are ready to  
part with it, as soon as its Opposition to  
a Divine Command shall be made out;  
if this, upon Examination, prove to  
be our Case, we have great Reason to  
think well of ourselves, and to Con-  
clude, that we are in such a State of  
Mind, as God will Accept, and Re-  
ward. A

*Second, and sure Proof of Religious* II.  
*Sincerity* may be drawn from a *General*  
*View* of the *Common* Course of our  
Lives, and Actions. If there be an *Even*  
*Tenor* of Goodness visible in our Con-  
duct,

SERM. duct, a *Regular and Steddy* Pursuit of

XII. Virtue, without any Gross and Notorious Failures in Scandalous Instances, and Flagrant Acts of Wickedness; if whenever we happen to fall by some great Temptation, we continue not long and quietly under the Guilt of it, but recover our Ground forthwith, and return to our Duty; proceeding on in the Paths of Obedience and an Holy Life habitually, and discharging our Obligations to God and Man pretty Evenly and Uniformly; then may we from hence also make a Comfortable Guess at the Goodness of our Condition in this World, and nourish very Promising Hopes to ourselves of being happy in Another. 'Tis not to be expected, that while we are in the Body, we should live altogether free from the Stains and Infirmities of it. In the very Best of Men, their Passions will sometimes prevail over their Reason, and the strongest Sense of their Duty will give way to a Present Temptation. A Pious Man may, now and then, be  
very



very Cold and Languid in the Perform-  
ance of his Devotions, and very full  
of Distractions and Wanderings. A  
Meek and Good Man, by some unfore-  
seen Accident, and by several Conspir-  
ing Circumstances, may be raised up  
into an Unbecoming Pitch of Anger  
and Resentment. A Temperate Man  
may through Importunity, or for want  
of a due Guard over himself, be gra-  
dually and insensibly betrayed into some  
Degree of Excess. But then, in all  
these Cases, the Person falling, quickly  
comes to himself again; the Fit is short,  
and soon over, and is succeeded imme-  
diately by Shame, and Remorse, by  
New Resolutions, and more Vigorous  
Endeavours. Consider the Man altoge-  
ther, and you will find, that the Gene-  
ral Current of his Behaviour bears wit-  
ness to his Integrity, though he fail now  
and then in particular Instances. And  
God, who sees all our Actions at once,  
will Judge us upon the whole View,  
and not single out our Worst Qualities,  
without any Regard to our Best, in or-  
der

S E R M.

XII.



SERM. der to exercise his Severity upon us.

XII.  Let no Man therefore too hastily, and too severely condemn himself for frequent Infirmities, Slips, and Neglects; let no Man, who would judge aright of his Spiritual Estate, fix his Eye too intently on some particular Blemishes and Failings, of which perhaps he is conscious; but let him look rather to the main Scope and Drift of his Thoughts, Words, and Actions; and by that let him try himself, as by the Justest Measure and Standard of Sincere Goodness. How contrary to this is the Conduct of some Good and Pious Souls! How usual is it for Persons, well advanced in Piety, when they are making such Enquiries as these, to dwell altogether on their Defects and Miscarriages, without regarding the Regular Course of a Virtuous and Well-ordered Life; and to condemn themselves, as False and Insincere, because they are not perfect and Sinless? God forbid, that These should be the Terms, upon which we are to be dealt with! For where then would be the

the Man upon Earth, who could under-  
go the Scrutiny? *If thou, Lord, shouldst*  
*be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O*  
*Lord, who may abide it? A*

S E R M.

XII.

Pl. CXXX.

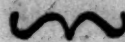
3.

*Third Sign and Test of Sincerity is, if* III.  
a Man be not content with any determin-  
ed Proportion of Goodness, nor willing  
to sit down at such a Point of Virtue,  
as he hath already attained, without  
aiming at a further Degree of Increase  
and Proficiency. For *the Path of the* Prov. iv.  
*Just is as the shining Light, says the Wise* 18.  
*Man, shining more and more unto a per-*  
*fect Day: That is, the truly Good are*  
always aiming to be better, and how  
far soever they have run in the Race of  
Virtue, still urge on-ward incessantly,  
and eagerly; *forgetting those things which* Phil. iii.  
*are behind, and reaching forth unto those* 12.  
*things which are before, they press towards*  
*the Mark for the Prize of the High-call-*  
*ing of God in Christ Jesus.* A Soul tru-  
ly touched with the Sense of its own  
Sins and Unworthiness, and of the In-  
finite Mercies and Condescensions of  
God



SERM. God towards us, will never Stint and

XII. Bound itself in its Returns; but will

 endeavour to Love as much, and to O-  
bey as far as is possible. Let its Attain-  
ments be what they will, yet it knows,  
that they are short, extremely short of  
its Obligations; that the Measures of  
Grace, which we arrive at here, are on-  
ly Earnests, and Spurs, and Helps to-  
wards larger Communications, and  
higher Improvements; and therefore  
that a Man is never so good as he *ought*  
to be, who doth not heartily desire, and  
design to be as good as he *can* be; and  
breathe and pant after Perfection itself,  
even in *this* Life, though he be satisfied,  
that it is not fully attainable, but in *ano-*  
*ther*; since withal he is satisfied, that the  
more uniformly and vigorously he presses  
toward the Mark of Perfection in this  
Life, the nearer still shall he approach  
to it, though he shall never Reach it;  
and the nearer he is towards reaching  
it here, the more glorious shall be his  
Crown, and the more exalted his State  
of Perfection hereafter. And therefore,  
if

if any one find himself inclined to circumscribe his Practice within such or such Limits of Duty beyond which he never intends, nor expects to go; to hold fast the Pleasures of Life, and to enjoy as much of them as ever he can, consistently with the Principles of Religion; arguing always for the Utmost Extent of his Christian Liberty, and desiring to make his Obligations as Narrow as may be; such an one hath Reason to conclude, that he is as yet short of those Qualifications, which are necessary to recommend him to the Judge of all Hearts, and Discerner of Spirits.

A *Fourth* Mark or Test by which a Man may discover, whether he be *sincerely Religious*, or not, is, to Examine himself, whether he be as inclinable to exercise the Graces and Virtues of the Christian Life in Private, as in Publick; without doing any thing merely for the Applause, or Fear of Men; but under a conscientious Regard to Him,

SERM. that *seeth in secret*, and under an Expec-

XII. tation that He, who *seeth in Secret*, will,  
 Matt. vi. 18. at the great Day of Account, reward  
*him Openly*. For Example, let a Man

consider, whether he be as punctual and exact in performing his *Closet*-devotions, as in repairing to the *Publick* Offices of the Church, and as Uneasy under the Omission of the *One*, as the *Other*; and when he prays in private, whether he be as Composed, and Reverent, and Devout in his Behaviour, as he is, when the Eyes of a great Assembly are upon him. Again, as to Points of Mercy, Generosity, and Justice, let him reflect, whether he be as ready to give Alms in *Private*, as in the *Streets*; to defend the Cause of the Injured and Oppressed, and to support a good Man's Reputation, in such Circumstances, when he is sure never to hear of it again, as he would be, if all the World heard, and observed him. Finally, whether he be as loth to defraud his Neighbour in a great Matter, or a small, when he might do it securely, without Fear of a Discovery;  
 very;



very; as he should be, if he were sure S E R M.  
to be arraigned in a Court of Judicature XII.  
for it. He that can truly answer these  
Questions to his Own Satisfaction, hath  
no great Reason to distrust his Sincerity;  
and He who cannot, hath as little Reason  
to depend upon it.

Hypocrisy, when in Perfection, will  
act real Goodness so well, and put on  
the Shape and Disguise of it so exactly,  
as to deceive even Him who plays the  
Part, as well as those who look on, and  
create a Belief in him that he is what he  
seems to be; till he compares himself  
with himself, his Private with his Publick  
Conduct: And that Touchstone never  
fails to distinguish True from Counter-  
feit Piety; for the surest Indications of  
Mens Characters are those Actions and  
Discourses which flow from them, when  
they are off of their Guard, and under  
no Awe, or Restraint from the Eyes and  
Observations of others.

A *Fifth* Thing, by which *Sincerity* in V.  
Religion manifests itself, is, when a Man  
appears to act, not out of Bye-aims,

SERM. and a Private Interest, but out of a true

XII. Zeal for the Honour of God, the Interest of Virtue, and the Good of Mankind.

Would you satisfy yourself, whether you sincerely love such a Relation, such an Acquaintance, such a Friend? Consider, do you on all Occasions design to promote what is for their Service and Reputation? do you heartily desire and endeavour Their good, without having an Immediate Eye on your own Advantage in it? If you do, 'tis certain that your Friendship and Affection are Sincere; for no Man can give better Proofs and Assurances of it. And the Case is the same with respect to God and Religion. If a Man feels himself inwardly warmed and acted by a true Concern for the Glory of God, for the Honour of his Name, and of his Worship; if he be apt to undervalue Worldly Regards, and petty private Views, in Comparison of this great End; if in Evil Days, when the Manners of Men are extremely corrupted, he is not ashamed to act up to strict Principles of Virtue, which

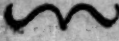
which are not in Fashion, nor is remiss S E R M.  
in the Practice of those Duties, which XII.  
he foresees, will scarcely turn to account;   
espousing firmly and unalterably the  
Cause of God, and Goodness, even  
when Hundreds on his Right Hand have  
gone off, and Thousands have revolted  
on his Left: In a word, when a Man  
can be Loose and Sceptical, with the  
General Applause of the World, and  
cannot be otherwise, without being de-  
spised, and pitied; and yet is so far  
from being tempted to a Compliance,  
that he doth what he can to stem the  
Torrent of Impiety, and to make his  
Virtue as Conspicuous, as other Mens  
Vices: When a Man, I say, doth, upon  
Reflection, find himself thus resolved  
and qualified, he hath great Reason to  
be pleased with his Condition, and to  
conclude, that it is well pleasing to  
God also: For there is no surer Mark of  
Integrity, than a Courageous Adherence  
to Virtue, in the midst of a General  
and scandalous Apostasy. Which is  
the Reason that *Noah* and *Abraham*,



SER M. *Lot* and *Daniel* have so high an Encomium bestowed on them in Scripture, and are recommended as Patterns of a strict, uncomplying Uprightness, to all succeeding Ages. Further,

VI. *Sixthly*, It is no slight Token of our *Sincerity* in Religion, if we are apt to suspect it, on the Account of *little* things; which is often the Case of very Devout *Christians*, and who have really the least Occasion to mistrust themselves, of any Men. Persons of a Nice and Tender Conscience, very careful to please God, and very fearful of offending him, are for that very Reason, prone to imagine that they fall infinitely short of their Duty, if they do not, in every respect, exactly discharge it; and to disquiet themselves on this Account, with many Groundless Scruples and Terrors. Sometimes, the Principle, from whence their Repentance sprang, gives them great Uneasiness; for they remember, that the Reformation of Heart and Life, in which they are now well

well advanced, began at first, not from S E R M.  
a true and ardent Love of God, but XII.  
from the mere Dread of Punishment. ~~~~~  
Sometimes their Unequal Performance  
of Religious Duties dejects, and dispirits  
them; they find themselves cold, and  
unmoved, when they are upon their  
Knees; in the most Solemn and Raising  
Parts of the Service, and even at the  
Reception of the Blessed Sacrament it-  
self, they do not feel an holy Warmth  
kindling in their Hearts, nor their Mind  
melting under the Impressions that are  
then made upon it: And they conclude  
therefore, that there is a Vein of Hypo-  
crisy running through all these Perfor-  
mances, which makes them Worthless,  
and Unacceptable. Now these, and  
such as these, I say, are, for the most  
part, the Doubts and Misgivings of the  
sincerely Good and Pious; for they are  
such as seldom trouble the Consciences  
of Men of a different Character: And  
therefore those very Scruples, which  
disturb good *Christians* so much, would,  
if rightly understood, give them Mat-

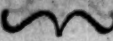
SERM. ter of sound Comfort and Encouragement; their very *Doubts* concerning the  
 XII.  Goodness of their State, are, if they had but the Heart to think so, a sure Reason why they should not doubt of it. Let not then the true Saints and Servants of God perplex and afflict themselves with such Difficulties; let them not give up Religion, by their Means, to the Laughter and Scorn of Profane Men, who, from a few such Instances as these, take Pleasure to represent it, as residing only in weak Brains, as the Employment of Melancholy, and Diseased Minds; and who stick not, in the Gayety of their Hearts, to say, that a strict Piety is good for nothing, but to make the Owners of it troublesome to themselves, and Useless to the rest of the World. O! let not any one, who wishes well to Goodness, disserve the Interest of it more, by his unreasonable Scruples, than he promotes it, by his Exemplary Practice! But let him resolve to summon up all his Reasoning Powers, and to set them in Array against these insignificant



significant Phantasms and Illusions, which S E R M.  
would certainly retire before this single XII.  
Reflection (had a Man but the Courage   
to make and to believe it) that such Niceties dwell usually there, where there is least Need of them, and are a real Sign of that *Sincere Piety*, the Want of which those, who thus unhappily suffer under them, deplore.

*Seventhly*, Another sure Token of our VII.  
*Sincerity* in Religion, is, when we delight to read the Holy Scriptures, and have a savory Taste and Relish of them; when we find somewhat more in them than in mere Human Writings, and are apt to settle into a pious Composure of Mind while we are perusing them. When we come to them with Satisfaction and Eagerness, and are uneasy under any long Discontinuance of our Conversation with them. This is the Token and Character, by which the experienced Psalmist teaches us to know a good Man. *His Delight* (saith he) *is in the* Psa'. i. 2.  
*Law of the Lord, and in that Law doth*  
be

SERM. *be meditate Day and Night.* 'Tis true,

XII.  it may sometimes happen, that a Person of a sound and sincere Piety shall read the Holy Scriptures, without being much warmed, or affected with them. He may be under an Indisposition and Languor of Mind; the Business, or Pleasures of Life, and Worldly Objects may now and then take Possession of his Heart, and shut the Door against Spiritual Impressions; but then this is not a Common and every Day's Case; he is for the most part well disposed and affected towards this Divine Employment; his Appetite is generally awakened, and his Taste very good; *and he rejoiceth in God's Word, as one that findeth great Spoils. Did not our Heart burn within us* (said the good Disciples) *while he talked with us by the Way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?* But if a Man can frequently peruse those sacred Pages, without any Degree of sensible Emotion and Concern, without being touched any ways by the Matter of them, or awed by the Majestick Man-  
ner

Pf. cxix.  
162.

Luk. xxiv.  
§ 2.

ner of Expression, which distinguishes S E R M.  
 them from all other Writings; this is XII.  
 as sure an Indication of a Sick Soul, as  
 a Palate, which does not relish the  
 most Savory Meats, is of a Diseased  
 Body. *The Fining Pot is for Silver, and* Prov. xvii.  
*the Furnace for Gold; but the Word of* 3.  
*God trieth the Hearts: And it is Quick*  
*and Powerful (saith the Author to the*  
*Hebrews) and sharper than any two-edged* Heb. iv.  
*Sword; piercing even to the Dividing* 12.  
*asunder of Soul and Spirit, and of the*  
*Joints and Marrow, and is a Discerner*  
*of the Thoughts and Intents of the Heart.*  
 And needs must that Heart be very hard  
 and Callous, and almost past Feeling,  
 upon which so pungent and searching a  
 Medicine doth not operate.

These are the several Marks or Tests,  
 by which we may Examine ourselves,  
 whether we are in the Faith, whether we  
 are possessed of that truly *Christian Sin-*  
*cerity* which God above all things re-  
 quires. Let us do it honestly and im-  
 partially; let us apply the Rules which  
 have been given, and take an Estimate  
 of



SERM. of the True State and Condition of our

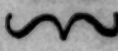
XII. Souls, by the means of them. If, upon  
 a strict Enquiry, we find, that our Hearts  
 are Right with God, let us give him  
 the Praise, and resolve by his Grace and  
 Blessing, to keep them so, *all the while*

Job xxvii. *our Breath is in us, and the Spirit of God*  
 3. *is in our Nostrils*; and endeavour to  
 grow in this Faith, and to increase in  
 this Grace, more and more, *till we come*

Ephes. iv. *in the Unity of the Faith, and of the*  
 13. *Knowledge of the Son of God, unto a*  
*perfect Man, unto the Measure of the*  
*Stature of the Fulness of Christ.* But if,

after a Serious Review of our Lives and  
 Consciences, it appears, that they are  
 not such as will strictly bear the Test;  
 let us form immediate Resolutions of  
 working ourselves up into those De-  
 grees of Sincerity which we want, and  
 1 Pet. i. 5. of being as *Holy and Blameless*, as we  
 ought to be, *in all Manner of Conversa-*  
*tion.*

May

May we every one of us so resolve, SERM.  
and be blessed in God's good Time, XII.  
with an happy and comfortable Effect   
of our Resolutions, through the mighty  
Assistances of his Holy Spirit, purchased  
for us by the Blood of his Dear Son!  
To which Eternal Three be for ever a-  
scribed all Honour, Adoration and Praise.  
*Amen.*

*F I N I S.*

3333

Now we are in a position to  
and to be able to find them  
will be happy to see them  
of our best interests



of this kind  
for us to be able to  
To which I refer  
which is known  
which is known

which is known  
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